

*GENDER AND DRAMATIC DISCOURSE WITH REFERENCE TO
ZAKES MDA'S SELECTED PLAYS*

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DEGREE

MASTER OF ARTS

In the subject

THEORY OF LITERATURE

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Mcebisi Ntuli and my children, Ncengiwe, Nomqhele and Mzomuhle, I dedicate this work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express gratitude to my highly devoted supervisor, Professor Marisa Keuris, for her remarks, guidance and support throughout.

My sincere thanks also go to Miss Nell Elsabe, the departmental librarian for her assistance in locating source materials.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the multiplicity of social positions within which African women in the postcolonial era find themselves. It focuses on how the dramatic dialogue depicts the positions of women in Zakes Mda's *The Nun's Romantic Story*, *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* and *You Fool, How can the Sky Fall*. The study is intended to explore the dramatic dialogue in these plays and to show whether there is any evidence of change in women's positions. It seeks to demonstrate the extent to which the positions of women have changed and also how the dramatic dialogue in the selected plays of Zakes Mda indicates the change in women's positions.

Keywords:dramatic dialogue, topic control, turn change, turn construction, turn distribution, turn length, turn order, turn sequencing, turn taking.

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| DEDICATION..... | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | iii |
| ABSTRACT..... | iv |
| CONTENTS..... | v |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Background to the Topic..... | 1 |
| 1.2 Research Questions..... | 3 |
| 1.3 Aims..... | 4 |
| 1.4. Methodology..... | 4 |
| 1.5 Scope of Research..... | 5 |
| 1.6 Structure of the Dissertation..... | 6 |
| CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS..... | 7 |
| 2.1. Introduction..... | 7 |
| 2.2. The Systematics of Turn Taking..... | 7 |
| 2.2.1. The turn constructional component..... | 9 |
| 2.2.2. The turn allocational component..... | 10 |
| 2.3. Turn Change Strategies..... | 13 |
| 2.3.1. Current speaker selects next..... | 13 |
| 2.3.2. Next speaker self selects..... | 14 |
| 2.3.2.1. Interruptions and overlaps..... | 16 |
| 2.3.3. Turn-may-lapse option..... | 19 |
| 2.3.3.1. Intra-turn pauses..... | 21 |
| 2.3.3.2. Gaps..... | 23 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 2.3.4. Turn constructional strategies: distribution, order, and length..... | 24 |
| 2.3.4.1. Distribution..... | 25 |
| 2.3.4.2. Turn size..... | 26 |
| 2.3.5. Turn sequencing strategies..... | 30 |
| 2.3.5.1. Adjacency pairs..... | 30 |
| 2.3.5.2. Insertion sequence..... | 31 |
| 2.3.5.3. Side sequence..... | 31 |
| 2.3.5.4. Repair sequence..... | 32 |
| 2.4. Gender and Dramatic Dialogue..... | 34 |
| 2.4.1. Gender..... | 35 |
| 2.4.2. Lakoff's view on language and gender..... | 36 |
| 2.4.2.1. Discrimination based on socialization..... | 36 |
| 2.4.2.2. Discrimination based on general language use..... | 38 |
| 2.4.3. Zimmerman and West's view on sex roles, language and social interaction..... | 41 |
| 2.5. Aston's Feminist Approach to the Study of Theatre..... | 43 |
| 2.5.1. Silencing of women..... | 44 |
| 2.5.2. The object positioning of the female subject..... | 45 |
| 2.5.2.1. Cixous' argument on objectification of women..... | 46 |
| 2.6. Conclusion..... | 46 |
| CHAPTER THREE: <i>THE NUN'S ROMANTIC STORY</i> | 48 |
| 3.1. Introduction..... | 48 |
| 3.2. The Nun's Romantic Story..... | 48 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 3.3. Male Dominance..... | 53 |
| 3.3.1. Exclusion as a strategy for dominance..... | 55 |
| 3.3.2. Dominance of conversational interaction..... | 57 |
| 3.4. Subordination of women..... | 60 |
| 3.4.1. Stereotyping of women..... | 60 |
| 3.4.2. Violence against women..... | 63 |
| 3.4.3. Women as objects to be looked at..... | 66 |
| 3.5. Women’s Empowerment..... | 70 |
| 3.5.1. Character portrayal..... | 70 |
| 3.5.2. Voice..... | 73 |
| 3.6. Conclusion..... | 77 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: <i>AND THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUNDAY DRESSES</i>..... | 79 |
| 4.1. Introduction..... | 79 |
| 4.2. And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses..... | 79 |
| 4.3. The Theme of Betrayal..... | 82 |
| 4.3.1. The theme of postcolonial political betrayal..... | 82 |
| 4.3.2. Betrayal of women in sexual terms..... | 86 |
| 4.4. The Theme of Poverty..... | 92 |
| 4.5. The Theme of Prostitution..... | 95 |
| 4.5.1. The Lady’s obsession with appearance..... | 101 |
| 4.5.2. Denigration of men..... | 105 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 4.6. The Theme of Corruption..... | 106 |
| 4.6.1. Women as agents of change..... | 109 |
| 4.7. Conclusion..... | 112 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: <i>YOU FOOL, HOW CAN THE SKY FALL ?</i> | 113 |
| 5.1. Introduction..... | 113 |
| 5.2. You Fool, How can the Sky Fall ?..... | 113 |
| 5.3. The Theme of Political Engagement..... | 117 |
| 5.3.1. Gender stereotyping..... | 117 |
| 5.3.2. Gendered subjects/roles..... | 122 |
| 5.4. The Minister of Health's Status..... | 126 |
| 5.4.1. Violence against women..... | 129 |
| 5.5. Subversion of Male Dominance..... | 132 |
| 5.6. Conclusion..... | 137 |
| CHAPTER SIX: GENERAL CONCLUSION..... | 138 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 142 |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the topic

First and foremost, this study has been prompted by various critics' arguments that "plays can only be properly understood and reacted to in the theatre" (Short in Culpeper et al 1998: 6). Brecht (cited in Culpeper et al 1998: 6) in particular, states that "plays can only be understood when performed" which implies that plays cannot only be understood through reading. This undervalues the play-text, and much has been written on this topic. However, even though most theorists today accept that the performative elements always have to be taken into account when discussing dramatic plays, one can still focus in a study on the analysis of textual elements.

Secondly, as Herman has mentioned in her work, "studies of dramatic dialogue as discourse, as a speech exchange system are hardly in evidence" (Herman 1995: 3) in theatre studies. It has been argued that this is "to safeguard the separation of dramatic dialogue from conversation in order to preserve the latter's literary quality" (*Ibid.*). Conversation has been perceived as non literary and as having no real connection with dramatic dialogue. According to Herman, critics such as Allardyce Nicoll (1968) and Bernard Beckerman (1970) have paid little attention to the fact that conversation and dramatic speech are related. They are speech exchange systems in the sense that in both there is always a "listener who usually changes discourse role to that of speaker" (*Ibid.*:5). Therefore, this study will not only show that plays can be analysed through close reading of the character's dialogue, it will also attest that there is a connection between dramatic dialogue and everyday conversation. The study will, hopefully, make a contribution in the field of dramatic language by demonstrating that the "rules and regularities operative in day-to-day exchanges" (*Ibid.*: 76) which work as "authenticating conventions" (*Ibid.*) are also "enabling conventions in the interpretation of dramatic dialogue" (*Ibid.*). In fact, "these rules are seen as those which actors" (*Ibid.*:77) in a play use "to order their

interactions and to make sense of their interactive activities” (*Ibid.*). In other words, these rules and conventions are a resource employed by dramatists in shaping the action.

To clearly show how the rules operative in conversation are a useful resource in analysing dramatic dialogue, Herman has indicated that the most important concept in conversational analysis is the concept of turn taking, a methodology that leads to frameworks of analysis which will be dealt with in depth during chapter 2 of the study.

My choice of Zakes Mda’s plays is justified by the fact that in them, as explained by Devant in Mda (1993: xxviii), “we find a scrutiny of the society in which Mda’s criticism brings out the contradiction, the aspirations and the frustrations of the oppressed”. As a postcolonial writer, his plays reveal women’s situations and positions that are comparable to those in which they found themselves during colonialism; this is in line with Devant’s argument that in Mda’s work, “...gender issues become central to the analysis” (*Ibid.*). A close analysis of his writing reveals that the postcolonial era never brought about equality of men and women. Women are still the most oppressed and marginalized group as there is continuing evidence of patriarchal dominance in many societies which diminishes their roles, positions and status. They are still viewed by men as helpless and powerless. They are objectified and also perceived in terms of the ‘gender role’ of womanhood where they are expected to take care of children and be subordinate to men. Men are still dominant where political power is concerned. What is of great interest, however, is that Mda empowers his female characters to face this situation and to deal with it in a new way.

Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni Mda, popularly known as Zakes Mda, was born on 6 October 1948 in Sterkspruit, Herschel District, in the Eastern Cape Province. In the early sixties his father was arrested for political reasons and in 1963, after securing bail, he left South Africa for Lesotho; the rest of the family followed him. Zakes Mda received all his high school education in Lesotho; after matriculating he studied law at the National University of Lesotho but later changed direction

and pursued a distance learning degree with a Swiss private fine arts academy. He completed his Master of Arts in Theatre, with the focus on playwriting, at Ohio University and then went on to obtain his second M.A from the School of Telecommunication, in the same university, focusing on radio and television. He attained his PhD from the University of Cape Town; the focus of his research was placed on how theatre could be used effectively as a medium for development communication.

Mda started writing plays while still at high school. His plays are not only a criticism of events in his native country, South Africa, but also of the socio-political status of his surrogate home, Lesotho. All the three plays on which the study is based, *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* (1993), *The Nun's Romantic Story* (1996), and *You Fool, How can the Sky Fall?* (2002) are set in postcolonial African states and I am confident that the depiction of dramatic discourse will display the workings of gender in these plays. In her work, Herman has shown that the very same frameworks for analysis of dramatic dialogue are "relevant to the analysis of gender in interactive discourse" (*Ibid.*: 286).

The Nun's Romantic Story deals with the subversion of "the implied authority of the male over the woman" (Lombardozzi 2002: 103). Throughout the play Anna-Maria indicates her refusal to submit to male dominance over herself. In *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses*, at first the Lady and the Woman demonstrate an attitude of powerlessness as they kowtow to their oppressors, but as the play progresses they realize that they are not victims: they can choose their destiny. *You Fool, How can the Sky Fall?*, portrays the attitude of men towards women in the public sphere. These different social positions where the women find themselves will be discussed at length in the subsequent chapters.

1.2. Research Questions

This dissertation addresses the following main question: how does dramatic dialogue as used in Zakes Mda's *The Nun's Romantic Story*, *And the Girls in their*

Sunday Dresses and *You Fool, How can the Sky Fall* ?depict the positions of women in these plays?

The sub-questions are:

- Does the dramatic discourse in Zakes Mda's plays show any evidence of change in women's positions in postcolonial African states?
- To what extent has the position of women changed in these states?
- How does the depiction of dramatic discourse in Mda's plays indicate the change in women's positions?

1.3. Aims

My main aim is to explore the concept of gender as depicted by the dramatic discourse found in these plays and also to demonstrate through my discussion of the three plays how this concept could make a contribution to the study and understanding of Zakes Mda's work.

Other aims are:

- To explore the depiction of dramatic discourse in the plays.
- To identify the most suitable frameworks used to reveal gender issues.
- To determine the influence of sex in interpersonal domination.

To achieve these goals I have adopted the following approach:

1.4. Methodology

For the theoretical framework, the systematics of turn taking which is central to conversational analysis will be discussed. The concept will be explained using 22 examples extracted from theoretical works including Liddicoat (1972), Sudnow (1972), Sacks et al (1974), Herman (1995), Pridham (2001), as well as Fugard's *No-Good-Friday*(1993) and *Island* (1993). Much attention has been given to Herman's work on dramatic dialogue as discourse since her contribution in this field is regarded as groundbreaking. Each play will be examined separately. A synopsis of the play will be provided as well as some discussions of it by other

commentators. The theoretical concepts relevant to each play will be summarized and demonstrated by analyzing extracts from the work. Throughout these analyses the focus will fall on the manner in which the dramatic discourse between the characters exposes gender issues, specifically the different positions of black women in the postcolonial era.

1.5. Scope of Research

When considering the debate on separating dramatic dialogue from conversation, it is necessary to base the study on Herman, one of the few theorists who have recognized the connection between the two forms of speech exchange systems. Allardyce Nicoll (1968) is one of the proponents of the said separation. According to Nicoll the world of drama is a 'world of emotions': he claims that it is impossible to use ordinary speech to express such emotions. He argues that conversational language is not always able to articulate a person's feelings in full. In other words, when these deep emotions are aroused we are incapable of expressing them because we speak with difficulty. Herman (1995) observes that Nicoll's strong opposition to the relationship between dramatic dialogue and conversational language has been supported by Beckerman (1970) whose argument is based on the notion that conversation is primarily social and cannot evoke emotion. He fundamentally claims that social norms "generally forbid the expression of emotion" (Herman 1995: 4). Even though these claims seriously undermine conversational language, Herman has shown its importance in the construction of dramatic dialogue in plays. She rules out the claim that conversation is passionless and further asserts that dramatic language cannot be a mirror image of conversational language. She suggests that the focus should be on the 'mechanics', "the rules underlying the orderly and meaningful exchange of speech in everyday context" (Herman 1995: 6) as they are "the *resource* that dramatists use to construct dialogue in plays" (*Ibid.*). She explains that day-to-day speech is controlled by some kind of mechanism which is known as the systematics of turn taking. This study will, therefore, focus on this model which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. It cannot be claimed that the study will offer an analysis that is all-

inclusive, but it will provide certain insights into gender issues in the selected plays. Sources include Zakes Mda's primary texts, articles by various critics and works of ethnomethodologists including Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) and Herman (1995).

1.6. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of six chapters. This introduction forms chapter 1 while chapter 2, the core of my study, focuses on the frameworks of analysis. It begins with a description of the turn taking system (section 2.2.) which is offered in terms of two components, namely the turn constructional component (section 2.2.1) and the turn allocational component (section 2.2.2.). The turn change strategies include the current speaker selects next option (section 2.3.1.), next speaker self selects (section 2.3.2.), and turn may lapse option (section 2.3.3.). Turn constructional strategies are dealt with in section 2.3.4, followed by sequencing strategies (section 2.3.5). The aspects of gender and dramatic dialogue include Lakoff's view of language and gender (section 2.4.2.) and Zimmerman and West's theory on sex roles, language and social interaction (section 2.4.3.). Aston's feminist approach to the study of theatre is dealt with in section 2.5: this focuses on silencing of women (section 2.5.1), object positioning of the female subject (section 2.5.2) and Cixous's argument as regards objectification of women (section 2.5.2.1). Chapter 3 analyzes the *Nun's Romantic Story* as the first play in the study. It focuses on how Anna-Maria, the female character, refuses to submit to the authority of the male characters, Pampiri, Malibu and S.C. Chapter 4 discusses *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* where Mda mainly explores the themes of postcolonial betrayal, betrayal of women in sexual terms, as well as those of poverty, prostitution and corruption. The emphasis is also placed on how Mda empowers his female characters, the Lady and the Woman, to become agents of social change. Chapter 5 analyzes *You Fool, How can the Sky Fall?* which focuses on men's attitude towards women in the public sphere. Chapter 6 undertakes a detailed discussion of the conclusions arising from the analysis of the plays.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1. Introduction

The main question my dissertation seeks to answer is how dramatic dialogue depicts the position of women in Zakes Mda's selected plays. This chapter deals with the frameworks for understanding and analyzing dramatic dialogue. Herman (1995) argues that the study of dramatic dialogue as interaction is very complex as it involves various frameworks of analysis. She suggests that the most important of all is the concept of *the turn*. This chapter, therefore, begins with a discussion of the concept of turn-taking which Sacks et al (1974) assert is fundamental to conversation, as well as to other speech exchange systems. It includes a discussion of the two components of the turn taking system. The chapter will also provide a detailed discussion of the rules and conventions of day to day exchange: these, Herman argues, are the resources that "prove useful in analyzing dramatic dialogue" (Herman 1995: 76). This involves the mechanisms that regulate turn change, distribution of turns and sequencing strategies. This discussion concerns what Herman has contributed in the field of theatre studies. Lastly, the chapter explores the relationship between dramatic dialogue and gender.

2.2. The systematics of turn-taking

According to Ekram Shoaib (2013: 56), "it has often been understood that the organization of conversation in day to day settings must be controlled by some kind of mechanism that facilitates the early distribution of turns and that governs the progress of talk". Ekram states that the description of such a mechanism was proposed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978). It has come to be known as *the systematics of turn-taking*. This view is largely supported by Herman (1995: 78) who attests that "central to conversation analysis is the concept of turn-taking which organizes the distribution and flow of speech between the two poles of interaction thereby keeping speech, generally, continuous". In her description of

turn-taking, Herman points out that the expectation in turn-taking is that “one participant A talks, stops; another, B, starts, talks, stops; and so we obtain an A-B-A-B-A-B distribution of talk across two participants” (*Ibid.*). She explains that the time gaps between one speaker stopping his [or her] speech and the next one who starts speaking is less than a second and the turns are appropriated in an orderly manner. Overlaps might occur but are not expected to be the norm in an interaction.

Herman (1995: 79) points out that in an investigation by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978) on the mechanism of turn-taking, they concluded that:

- 1) Speaker change recurs, or at least occurs
- 2) Overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time
- 3) Occurrences of more than one speaker at a time are common, but brief
- 4) Transition from one speaker to the next with no gap or overlap between them is common. Together with transitions characterized by slight gap or slight overlap, they make up the vast majority of transitions
- 5) Turn order is not fixed but varies
- 6) Turn size is not fixed but varies
- 7) Length of conversation is not fixed, specified in advance
- 8) What parties say is not fixed, specified in advance
- 9) Relative distribution of turns is not fixed, specified in advance
- 10) Number of parties can change
- 11) Talk can be continuous or discontinuous
- 12) Turn allocation techniques are obviously used. A current speaker may select a next speaker (as when a current speaker addresses a question to another party); parties may self-select, in starting to talk

13) Various 'turn constructional units' are employed. Turns can be projectively 'one- word long' or, for example, they can be sentential in length

14) Repair mechanisms for dealing with turn-taking errors and violations are obviously available for use; for example, if two parties find themselves talking at the same time, one of them will stop prematurely, thus repairing the trouble.

(Sacks et al. 1978)

The above conclusions are clearer in Sacks et al. (1974:702) where they describe the turn-taking system in terms of "two components and a set of rules" that govern "turn construction, providing for the allocation of a next turn to one party, and coordinating transfer so as to minimize gap and overlap" (Sacks et al. 1974:704). These two components are:

- (1) The turn constructional component
- (2) The turn-allocational component.

2.2.1. The turn constructional component

Liddicoat (2007: 54) recommends that the "first step towards understanding how turn-taking works in conversation involves understanding what turns at talk actually look like". Sacks et al. cited in Liddicoat (2007: 54) state that the "turns are made up of units which they call turn constructional units (TCU)". As Herman (1995) notes, the turn units are composed of turn types, which may vary in size. They may be a sentence, a phrase, a clause or a word. The turn units are "characterized by their projectability or predictability of their closure as a unit" (Herman 1995: 80). The projectability of turn units, according to Liddicoat, (2007: 56) means that "a recipient can know roughly what it will take to complete the unit of talk currently under way". In short, speakers are able to project where a TCU will be possibly concluded. In the example below, the recipient projects the conclusion of the TCU. The turns are numbered for the purpose of analysis.

Example (1)

(1) D: *They haftuh run programs for them to rehabilitate them tuh- to deal with the new materials. And if they ca:nt,*

(2) A: *They're out.*

(3) D: *Mm hm,*

(Lerner 1991 in Liddicoat 2007: 57)

In example (1) above, A completes D's utterances by providing an explanation of what will happen to the people D is talking about if they cannot run new programmes. In the example it is also noticeable that "a single TCU is spread over two turns at talk", (Liddicoat 2007: 57), that is, turn 1 and 2, "and, in order to be able to do this, A needs to be able to tell roughly what it would take to complete the TCU under way using the *if...then* syntactic frame to aid the projectability of the talk" (Liddicoat 2007: 57).

The end of the unit, according to Herman (1995:80), "is the place where speaker change occurs and the turn may pass to another speaker". In this way, the turn progresses and this juncture has been named as *a transitional relevance place*. This place is respected by participants since it marks the switch to the next speaker and the success of the switch. Herman (1995) emphasizes that in most cases, the switch from one speaker to next speaker is effected without a gap or overlap.

2.2.2. The turn allocational component

According to Herman in Culpeper et al (1998: 20) the turn allocational component "regulates the changeover of turns". In more precise words, Benson, cited by Mahmoodi-Bakhtiaria and Pourseyedian (2013:100), defines the turn allocation as "conversation in many ways governed by a system through which speakers offer spaces in which others may speak...". It allows turn exchange.

The turn allocational component has clearly set out rules for the "allocation of the next speaker's turn in such a way that the transition is smooth" (Herman 1995: 81).

In order to understand the rules, it is important to identify the three key words that, according to Herman (1995), have been used by Sacks et al in formulating the rules. These are: C = current speaker, N = next turn and TRP = Transition Relevance Place. The rules are distributed into two groups:

- 1) those in which the next turn is allocated by current speaker's selecting next speaker
- 2) those in which a next turn is allocated by self selection.

(Sacks et al. 1974: 703)

The selection of speakers, Herman (1995) notes, in both cases is done at TRP. Herman (1995: 81) explains that "where neither option is used, the turn lapses, but the rules can operate recursively so that one or the other option could be used again till the turn passes to the next speaker". The rules therefore, "provide for three options including the failure option" (*Ibid*):

- 1) current speaker selects next
- 2) next speaker self selects
- 3) the turn may lapse and the lapses be incorporated into the current turn as pauses till the turn change occurs via one or the other two options

(Herman 1995: 81)

A version of the rules has been described by Levinson (1983) cited by Herman (1995). Levinson observes that:

Rule 1- applies initially at the first TRP of any turn

- a) if C selects N in current turn, then C must stop speaking, and N must speak next, transition occurring at the first TRP after N- selection
- b) if C does not select N, then any (other) party may self select, first speaker gaining rights to the next turn

- c) if C has not selected N and no other party self-selects under option (b), then C may (but need not) continue (i.e. claim rights to a further turn-constructual unit)

Rule 2- applies at all subsequent TRPs

When Rule 1(c) has been applied by C, then at the next TRP Rules 1 (a)-(c) apply and recursively, at the next TRP, until speaker change is effected.

(Levinson in Herman 1995: 81)

The above rules, as stated by Herman (1995:81), ensure that “one speaker speaks at a time and they remove the clash potential in the two sets of techniques available for turn change”, that is “current speaker selects next/ next speaker self selects” (*Ibid.*). In Rule 1 (b), where C does not select N and which gives the allowance of any other party to self select, the first speaker has the right to maintain the turn. This rule prevents conflicts because in cases of simultaneous starts, the competing other must drop out, but if this rule is not respected, it means that the rights of the first speaker are being defied (Herman 1995). Furthermore, the expectation that speakers respect the TRP, ensures that the turns are free from gaps and overlaps; however, the “next speaker may mistakenly assume that the turn has been completed” (Herman 1995: 82), for example, after tag questions. Beyond this, overlaps “would generally be regarded as an interruption” (*Ibid.*). These rules, therefore, ensure an orderly and smooth speaker change.

Having discussed the two components of the turn-taking system and the rules that ensure the smooth transition of turns, at this point it is appropriate to introduce the mechanisms that regulate turn change, turn order, distribution of turns and sequencing strategies. Herman (1995: 92) confirms that “dramatic speech in its actional and interactional mode is not dependent on literary quality alone, or even on language alone...”; it also depends on the mechanisms to be discussed below.

2.3. Turn change strategies

As discussed in section 2.2.2, for turn change to occur, the system generates three options: current speaker selecting next, next speaker self selecting or the turn may lapse option. These options are dealt with individually, below.

2.3.1 Current speaker selects next

In this option the current speaker can select the next one “by indicating preference by naming, by the use of pronouns or address forms, by pointing or by eye contact and gazing at the selected speaker” (Herman in Culpeper et al. 1998: 20). Herman (1995) indicates that the current speaker may select the previous speaker, thus creating an A-B-A-B alternating pattern. She nevertheless, suggests that “the next speaker need not be the previous speaker, someone else could be selected” (*Ibid.*: 82) resulting in an A-B-C-B-A ...pattern. An example of this option is found in the extract below taken from scene 1 of Athol Fugard’s play *No-Good-Friday*. The turns are named numerically for the purpose of analysis.

Example (2)

(1) HIGGINS: *Evening, Willie...Guy! We’ve missed you at the Jazz Club meetings.*

(2) GUY: *I’ve been meaning to look in, Father. Just that I’ve been trying to get started as a professional and that takes time. All of it.*

(3) HIGGINS: *How far have you got?*

(4) GUY: *I’ve reached the first stage. I’m blowing the sax on an empty stomach.*

(5) HIGGINS: *You’ll be all right, Guy. In fact I want to see you about something. Come up to the church on Sunday afternoon and we’ll talk about it. How’s Willie?*

(6) WILLIE: *Surprised. It’s not often we see you here, Father.*

(Fugard 1993: 10)

Throughout the extract, the characters select each other by *name* and pronoun *you*. In turn 1, current speaker (Higgins) selects next speaker by name (Guy) and Guy takes the turn. It is evident that for turn 4, Guy has to respond because current speaker in turn 3 has selected him by pronoun *you*. This is also the case in turn 5 where Higgins selects next speaker, Willie, by name. The extract, specifically turn 6, demonstrates that the next speaker does not have to be the previous one.

2.3.2 Next speaker self selects

This option allows speakers to self select. It occurs when speakers “elect to speak themselves at a relevant place in the flow of conversation” (Bennison in Culpeper et al. 1999: 72). Sacks et al. (1974: 705) aver that “the use of self selection technique is contingent on the non-use of ‘current selects next’ techniques”. In other words, if the current speaker has not selected the following speaker, self selection occurs. “The basic technique for self selection is starting first” (Sacks et al. 1974: 718); “the first starter gets the turn” (*Ibid.*). According to Sacks et al. (1974: 706), the ‘next speaker self select’ option “encourages earliest possible start for each self selector”. It thereby “provides for overlap by competing self selectors for a next turn, when each projects his [her] start at some possible Transition Relevance Place, producing simultaneous starts” (*Ibid.* : 706-707). An instance of this option is found in scene 1 of Athol Fugard’s play *No-Good-Friday*:

Example (3)

- (1) **HIGGINS:** *I’m sorry. I didn’t want it to end like this. Come, Tobias,
We must go somewhere else.
[They start to leave.]*
- (2) **GUY:** *Come on, Willie, give old Blanket-boy a break.*
- (3) **WILLIE:** *Don’t you understand, Guy, the breaks usually breaks them.*
- (4) **GUY:** *He’s going to be broken a lot quicker if he’s picked up. Have*

a heart, man! What about the lift job you told me about?

[Tobias moves up to Willie]

(5) TOBIAS: *I'm not frightened of work.*

(6) GUY: *There, you are, old Blanket-boy's guts*

(Fugard 1993: 12)

The extract begins when Father Higgins and Tobias are about to leave because Willie has failed to offer them help. Higgins, in turn 1 selects Tobias as next speaker but when Tobias does not respond verbally, Guy self selects in turn 2. In turn 4, Guy selects next speaker through the use of the imperative sentence *Have a heart, man!* The question *what about that lift job you told me about?* is another clue that the current speaker, Guy, is selecting the subsequent speaker. Instead of Willie responding to Guy's question, Tobias in turn 5, self selects. In fact, he grabs the turn and insinuates himself into the interaction in an attempt to convince Willie to come to his rescue. Willie does not respond to Tobias' plea, which leads to Guy self selecting in turn 6.

A clear example showing the next speaker self selects option, where each self selector projects his start at a TRP thereby producing simultaneous starts, is found in the extract below.

Example (4)

(1) PARKY: *Oo what they call them dogs that pull the sleighs.*

(2) PARKY: *S-sledge dogs.*

(3) OLD MAN: *Oh uh* : Uh

(4) TOURIST: Uh- Huskies.

(5) OLD MAN: Huskies, Mm,

(7) PARKY : Huskies. Yeh Huskies

(Labovs: Battersea: A: 7 in Sacks et al. 1974:707)

In example (4) above, it is noticeable that the simultaneous starts are a result of the participants' attempts to project their start to be earliest. It is however, important to mention that the speakers' attempt to do so is a result of the 'one-speaker-speaks-at a time' turn taking rule: where there are dual starts, for instance, one speaker must drop out so that the integrity of the speaking turn can be maintained and the turn can proceed unsullied by other voices" (Herman in Culpeper et al. 1998: 23). When the dual starts or simultaneous talk occur, "such as interruption and overlaps" (King 2010-2011: 207), they are "considered undesirable and can be symptomatic of conflict" (*Ibid.*). At this juncture is appropriate to begin a discussion of interruptions and overlaps as Liddicoat (2007) considers that one of their possible sources would be two self selecting speakers.

2.3.2.1 Interruptions and overlaps

According to Herman (1995: 107) interruptions and overlaps are forms of behavior at TRP that "bring interactants into competition for the floor". They are conflictual. However, there are 'free-for- all floors, which:

are characterized by much simultaneous speech with partial or full overlaps enacting collaboration of a different kind, with multiple speakers using the same next turn in answer to a question or building up different aspects of a joke in different ways simultaneously to tease previous speakers or by different speakers and different utterance units and contents, contributing to the development of an idea, again simultaneously, with multiple speakers- displaying thereby that they are on 'the same wave length'. Collaboration in this kind of floor uses simultaneous speech, overlaps, etc [*sic*] positively.

(Edelsky 1993 cited in Culpeper et al. 1998: 23)

The free-for-all floors, as described by Edelsky, where speech business proceeds simultaneously, and with overlaps (Herman in Culpeper et al. 1998), are not considered as conflictual. The following example is an illustration of such overlaps.

Example (5)

JOE: *B't hewannid the dawg dih bite iz wife.*

(0.5)

Ehhh

JOE: *So he come [s ho: me one] night] the sonofa]=*

CAROL: *[heh hehhehhehhehheh heh]*

JOE: *= bitch [bit hi: m.]*

CAROL: *[bit hi: m,]*

(Jefferson 1983 in Liddicoat 2007: 85)

In example (5) above, “Carol’s overlap is a demonstration that she understands the trajectory that Joe’s talk has projected” (Liddicoat 2007: 85). She is ‘tuned in’ to the story and above all, “it is a much stronger display of understanding...and indication of Carol’s involvement as a recipient for the story” (*Ibid.*). This actually embodies Edelsky’s point that speakers are on ‘the same wave length’. Herman (1995:113) concurs with this view stating that “overlaps occur because listeners anticipate the speech of another and display it, and signal their affiliation by making an interactive reality of attentiveness in listening”.

Liddicoat (2007: 82) explains that “overlapping talk can be either problematic or unproblematic”. A small amount of overlap is usually perceived as unproblematic even by the speakers themselves but “longer overlaps, however, may be problematic...” (*Ibid.*). Hence “the term *interruption* is best reserved for these problematic overlaps” (*Ibid.*). This kind of problematic overlap is described by Herman in Culpeper et al. (1998: 23) as “any disruption of speaker rights by another speaker” that is “generally, if not always, seen as conflictual” (*Ibid.*). According to Herman (1995: 107), “who interrupts whom in plays, who drops out and who preserves and maintains the initiative can be significant, for such choices

create forms of interpersonal drama in their own right". She emphasizes that a dramatist whose turn change options involve interruptions "can bring opposition, conflict and tension into the interaction..." (*Ibid.*:111). The example below from Athol Fugard's *No-Good-Friday* scene 4 affords an illustration of a conflictual overlap:

Example (6)

(1) **WILLIE:** *I'm sick of running away.*

(2) **GUY** : *You've never run away from anything before, Willie.*

(3) **WILLIE:** *I've been running away my whole life.*

(4) **REBECCA:** *Willie...*

(5) **WILLIE:** *Don't try to tell me that's not true because it is.*

(6) **REBECCA:** *Listen to me...*

(7) **Willie:** *No! For once there is something I'm going to work out for myself. The way I want it, the way I feel it should be worked out, without advice or kind encouragement from anyone.*

(Fugard 1993: 42)

In example 6, above, the turn change options adopted reveal the conflict between Rebecca and Willie. Rebecca is apprehensive that Willie has put his life in danger by reporting Shark to the police for murdering Tobias. In turn 4, she tries to talk to Willie; instead, Willie interrupts her. Rebecca again attempts to speak in turn 6 but Willie interrupts her again. He denies Rebecca her speaking rights by refusing to listen to her: in this way their differences are revealed.

A character's reaction to interruption is "equally important" (Herman 1995: 111) because "the degree to which characters are prepared to interrupt others is an important indication of their power..." (Bennison in Culpeper et al. 1998: 75). A

character who is mostly interrupted and does not fight for the floor is interpreted as the less powerful speaker, so that those speakers “who accrue to themselves the rights and privileges of speech may be the more dominant characters” (Herman 1995: 111). Short (1996: 206) cited by Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari and Pourseyedian (2013: 100) confirms that “the turn taking has clear connections with conversational power”. The character’s power or authority can be manifested in the types of turns in conversation, which could be those structured through interruption in this particular case. In example 6, for instance, the turn change is structured through interruptions, and it signifies the power of the character, Willie, who monopolizes the floor. His rudeness in turn 7 reflects his dominance over Rebecca.

Wilson and Zimmerman (1984: 160) have maintained that “interruptions are violations of normal turn taking procedures and without such as a theory, little understanding can be had on how exogeneous factors such as social status, personality traits and pathology are woven into the actual course of interaction”. My discussion will consequently also focus on interruptions as a strategy for turn change.

2.3.3 Turn-may-lapse option

Herman (1995) labels this option as the failure option. It occurs when the first option (see 2.3.1) and the second option (see 2.3.2) have not been used. “When neither option is used, the turn lapses” (Herman 1995: 81) and “the original speaker may incorporate the lapse into their own turn as pause and continue with the turn” (Ekram 2013: 55). Herman in Culpeper et al. (1998: 20) states that “in the case of a lapsed turn, the silence that follows is regarded as an *attributable silence*”. In other words, “It is attributable to the speaker whose turn has lapsed” (Saville-Troike 1995: 6 cited by King 2011: 206). The following extract from the opening scene of Pinter’s *The Home coming* (1965, 1978) provides a clear picture of the turn-may-lapse option.

Example (7)

(1)MAX: *what have you done with the scissors?*

[pause]

I said I'm looking for the scissors. What have you done with them?

[pause]

Did you hear me? I want to cut something out of the paper.

(2)LENNY: *I'm reading the paper.*

(3) MAX: *Not that paper. I haven't even read that paper. I'm talking about last Sunday's paper. I was just having a look at it in the kitchen.*

[pause]

Do you hear what I'm saying? I'm talking to you! Where's the scissors?

(4) LENNY: *[Looking up quietly] Why don't you shut up, you daft prat.*

(Pinter in Herman 1995: 93)

In example 7 above, Lenny is in a sitting room. He is reading a newspaper, Max comes in and initiates the conversation. Lenny's turns are "predominantly constructed on the turn-may-lapse option" (Herman 1995: 93). Herman observes that the resulting interaction introduces the audience to a hostile world. "With every pause in the text, a TRP is projected by Max, to which Lenny fails to respond" (*Ibid*). The silence that follows is 'attributable' to Lenny, who 'owns' it, "which is taken as such by Max who reinitiates over and over again, incorporating Lenny's lapses into his turn, as pauses, in order to get a response from Lenny" (*Ibid.* : 93-94).

According to Herman (1995) Lenny's non responsiveness is intentional. The turn lapses by Lenny are "part of his interactive strategy with Max which he uses to ignore Max" (*Ibid.*: 94). However, Max continues to "extend his turn by repeated attempts to get a response from Lenny in defiance of the opt-out to talk displayed by Lenny" (*Ibid.*). The extract highlights the relationships that could be displayed in the plays examined in this study. These relationships will be dealt with in detail in the chapters where the plays are considered.

It is very easy to assume that the exploitation of the turn-may-lapse option is of little significance in drama "since dramatic speech is generally regarded as tidied up speech, and smooth turn change would be the required norm, given that stage speech needs to be audible to the audience" (Herman 1995: 93). However, the use of the turn-may-lapse option is important as it introduces us to the pause strategies that dramatists use for certain purposes. At this point I shall begin the discussion of the pause strategies.

2.3.3.1 Intra-turn pauses

These occur when "speakers break the flow of their speech by punctuating the turn itself with brief silences" (Herman 1995:94). According to Herman (1991), an intra-turn silence does not happen at TRP; it is a pause and is not expected to be filled by another speaker. However, Herman (1995: 94) comments that intra-turn pauses "create ambiguities since they may be misjudged as TRPs or used by another speaker to grab the floor". A perfect example of an intra-turn pause is hesitation (Herman 1995); Bennison in Culpeper et al. (2002: 73) argues that this is an important indicator of "a character's state of mind" as it usually implies "discomfort: unease, powerlessness or embarrassment" (*Ibid.*).

Intra-turn silences may signify "thoughtfulness or attempts to recall or focus on relevant aspects or even kind of privacy or self closure as if lost in memory or lost in thought" (Herman: 1995: 95). They might show "lack of confidence or may be used by the speaker to create suspense or to highlight something about to be said"

(*Ibid.*). The following examples from Fugard's *No-Good-Friday* illustrate the uses of intra-turn silences.

Example (8)

(1) PINKIE: ...*Now tell me, what would you do?*

(2) TOBIAS: *I ... [Pauses, not knowing what to say.]*

(3) PINKIE: *[encouraging him]. Ja, come on.*

(4) TOBIAS: *I don't know.*

(Fugard 1993: 19-20)

In this short extract the intra-turn pause is made by Tobias in turn 2. It shows that he does not have confidence in himself and, as the stage direction confirms, he is even not sure of what to say.

Example (9)

REBECCA: *Why always so suspicious? Every time I try to*

Understand you shut up, like you didn't want to share anything.

WILLIE: *I share the money. [Pause.] I'm sorry. I didn't mean to*

say it.

Fugard 1993: 27)

In example 9 above, it is evident that the intra-turn pause made by Willie signifies thoughtfulness. He discovers that he has been rude in saying "I share the money" and endeavours to repair his utterance.

2.3.3.2 Gaps

This is silence at the end of a turn which has not lapsed and which according to the turn-taking rules "has to be minimized if possible, by some speaker" (Herman 1991: 102). According to King (2010-2011: 206) "gaps can be prevented from

turning into lapses by the current speaker self selecting, thereby turning the gap into a pause and producing another TCU which ends at TRP". Herman (1995) adds that because of the facts that gaps happen at turn boundaries and that in duration they appear more like pauses than lapses, they have been labelled as switching pauses. She argues that a complication of telling "who owns the gap" (*Ibid.*: 96) is created. It becomes difficult to tell whether the gap is 'attributable' to the first speaker or the second. The extract below, from Pinter's *One For The Road*, illustrates how a gap is minimized, being turned into a pause and thus producing another TCU.

Example (10)

(1) VICTOR: *[Quietly] I don't know you.*

(2) NICOLAS: *But you respect me.*

(3) VICTOR: *I don't know you.*

(4) NICOLAS: *Are you saying you don't respect me?*

[pause]

(5) NICOLAS: *Are you saying you would respect me if you
knew me better? Would you like to know me better?*

(Pinter 1984:3)

In the extract "the action being undertaken is completed and it is possible either of the speakers could legitimately speak in the place occupied by the...silence..." (Liddicoat 2007: 80). Also, it is noticeable that "the silence is not attributable to a particular participant not speaking..." (*Ibid.*). This is because Nicolas has used a rhetorical question in his turn 4. What is happening is that in turn 5 Nicolas decided to self select and the gap has turned into a pause which has led to another TCU. This is what the turn-taking rules encourage in order for the gaps to be minimized.

Herman (1995) observes that silences are not just used in cases where there is absence of speech, but they also “function as communicative and meaningful elements in interaction” (*Ibid.*: 98) and are resources to be used by dramatists. Herman (1995: 96) argues that “a gap before speaking could signify reluctance to speak”, or might signify the speaker’s own sense of the “inevitability of her speech” (*Ibid.*). A gap before commands or requests could mean “defiance or refusal or even politeness” (*Ibid.*) while sometimes it could show the “think before you speak maxim, thus making the response more deliberate” (*Ibid.*).

Until this point, the discussion has considered the turn-change strategies offered by the turn-taking system. These techniques are also used by playwrights and will later be demonstrated in Mda’s plays. In the following section the emphasis is on turn-constructual strategies.

2.3.4. Turn constructual strategies: distribution, order and length.

Distribution, order and length are floor management strategies. The way a dramatist “manages the floor for turns is of interest, since respecting or rejecting a character’s turn rights will be significant” (Herman 1995: 114). These floor management strategies “involve more than order; distribution, length of turns...are also included” (*Ibid.*). These strategies will be dealt with individually in the sections below.

2.3.4.1 Distribution

Turn distribution involves the number of turns that are allocated to a speaker. The distribution patterns have significant consequences of which one is *exclusion*. This occurs when a speaker is made to wait for a turn. Waiting for a turn or exclusion could mean that “the turn taking system in force...is based on order of precedence...” (Herman1995: 114).To illustrate how the exclusion strategy functions, an extract follows, taken from Athol Fugard’s *No-Good-Friday*:

Example (11)

(1) HIGGINS: *That's up to you. But I'll tell you what I do want. A little help for a friend. This is Tobias. Tobias Masala. He has just arrived here from the Eastern Transvaal. [Willie stares at the newcomer with little warmth.] A simple man, Willie, like so many of our people I was wondering if you could help. He'll do anything provided there is enough in it for him to live and maybe save a little each month.*

(2). WILLIE: *Why do they do it!*

(3). HIGGINS: *Do what?*

(4). WILLIE: *That! Why do they come here, like that!*

(5). HIGGINS: *He only wants to live, Willie. You know better than I do the stories they bring with them of sick women and hungry children.*

(Fugard 1993: 11)

In example 11 above, all the turns are in the hands of Higgins and Willie. What is interesting is that even though Tobias is talked about in his presence, he is kept away or excluded from the conversation. This means that “his speaking rights are being projected but removed simultaneously” (Herman 1995: 116) by the other speakers. The questions they pose could allow Tobias to grab the turn but he does not. He just watches from the sidelines as they talk about him. Higgins and Willie’s interaction reveals Tobias’ social rank. In fact, in turn 1 Higgins states clearly that Tobias is a newcomer. It is his first experience of living in Sophia town, which alone causes him to be a social misfit. He finds it difficult to get accustomed to the new environment. He fails to grab a turn and join the conversation which is basically about him. Higgins also describes Tobias as a simple man, which suggests that he is mentally naive. His “loss of speech here is also a loss of identity” (*Ibid.*). The fact that he is excluded from the conversation ‘erases’ him though he is physically present, and also reveals the asymmetrical power relations between Tobias and the other characters.

2.3.4.2 Turn size

In terms of turn size, “participatory proportionality would be the unmarked norm in order to maintain the inter-personal balance among characters in speech exchange” (Herman 1995: 118). However, “such norms are often breached since inter-personal equilibrium is not the most functional option in dramatic world” (*Ibid.*). Herman explains that speech size can be used as a dramatic technique to dominate, and a sign of power. “The hyper dominant speakers who claim time and extended speech rights put pressure on the floor, disproportionately” (*Ibid.*), thus revealing their power. Bennison in Culpeper et al. (1998:70) declares that “a quantitative analysis of the length of...turns can provide useful initial clues to a character’s behavior- their relative power in the speech situation...”. An example of a character who has claimed extended speech rights is found in scene 5 of Athol Fugard’s *No-Good-Friday*.

Example (12)

(1)PINKIE: *We don’t like things the way they are, Willie.*

(2)WILLIE: *Nobody but a moron would like them. But there’s a lot of it we make ourselves, and a lot we accept.*

(3)PINKIE: *Such as?*

(4) WILLIE: *Such as Tobias’s death and a character called Shark. Our handiwork. We’ve been good customers. Every Friday night on the dot...five shillings...for a long time. So when a man like Tobias walks in he’s out in the cold if he doesn’t pay...And being a man he wouldn’t want to pay. There’s nothing that says we must surrender to what we don’t like. There is no excuse like saying the world’s a big place and I’m just a small little man. My world is as big as I am. Just big enough for me to do something about it. If I can’t believe that there’s no point in living.*

(Fugard 1993: 51)

In example (12) above, it is clear that Willie is a powerful character. He is educated and the people of Sophiatown look up to him, holding him in high esteem. They are concerned about his safety as he has reported Shark, the thug, to the police. However, Willie does not regret his actions. He is not afraid of Shark. Through his lengthy speech and his assertive behaviour, his power is demonstrated. He states firmly that Blacks are also to blame for the street violence as they have been 'good customers' for Shark. His power becomes evident when he declares that he is as big as the world. He adds, if he fails to recognize his power there is no point in living.

Herman (1995) further explains that apart from power, longer speeches can be used to expose the character's feelings, emotions and anxieties. At some point, the character's "argumentative and intellectual dexterities" (Herman 1995: 118) might also be revealed by the use of turn length. The example below which is found in scene 4 of Athol Fugard's *No-Good-Friday* illustrates the use of long turns to display the character's argumentative and mental dexterity.

Example (13)

GUY: *And I thought you didn't like him.*

WILLIE: *Of course I didn't. I hated him. I hated him because I feared Him. These 'simple men' with their innocence and dreams. How can we dream? When I was a child I used to lay awake at night in the room where my mother and us kids used to sleep. I used to lay awake and think. I'd say to myself, 'you're black'. But hell it was so dark I couldn't see my own hand. I couldn't see my blackness, and I'd get to thinking that may be the colour wasn't so important after all...and because I'd think that, I could dream a little. But there was*

always the next morning with its light and the truth. And the next morning used to come so regularly and make the dream so stupid that I gave up dreaming...

(Fugard 1993:43)

In the above extract, Willie as a scholar in the township has realised that although he is educated, he will be unable to develop himself socially and economically because of his skin colour. His dreams seem to fade away as he realises that it is a waste of time to dream. He indicates he used to dream at night but when morning comes, it comes with its truth. The truth is that he is black. He is aware that there is no possibility of social mobility since the blacks possess no rights. Willie's speech size, therefore, is a tool to reveal his thought process. It expresses the way he views the reality of blacks in apartheid South Africa.

Short turns, on the other hand, "speed up tempo of the interaction in a segment to signify panic, fear,...as turn follows upon turn in quick succession" (Herman 1995: 121-122). They can also signify urgency (*Ibid.*) as illustrated in the example below from scene 2 of Athol Fugard's *The Island*.

Example (14)

JOHN: *Okay?*
WINSTON: *[still busy]. No.*
JOHN: *Okay?*
WINSTON: *No.*
JOHN: *Okay?*
WINSTON: *No.*
(Fugard 1993:207)

There are also short turns that show a lack of common focus amongst speakers on the content of the speech, or misunderstanding in an attempted communication

(Herman 1995)). To illustrate this, an example is quoted from scene 1 of Athol Fugard's *The Island*.

Example (15)

JOHN: *Hey, there.*

WINSTON: *What?*

JOHN: *With the others.*

WINSTON: *[taking the nails]. What's this?*

JOHN: *Necklace, man. With the others.*

WINSTON: *Necklace?*

JOHN: *Antigone's necklace.*

(Fugard 1993: 198)

In example (15) above, John and Winston are in a cell and have just returned from the day's manual labour. John pulls out three or four rusty nails from his secret pocket in his trousers which he will use to finish making Antigone's necklace. Winston's turns show that he does not really know what is going on or what John is referring to.

The preceding sections have included a discussion of turn change strategies and turn constructional strategies. Another important mechanism that needs much attention and which can reveal the behavior of characters is the sequential organization of turns. This is dealt with in the next section.

2.3.5 Turn sequencing strategies

Turns do not appear independently of each other. If a speech is initiated, "it calls forth another speech, which in turn calls forth further speech" (Herman 1995: 122). How these speeches or turns are structured depends on the dramatist's structuring of turns or sequencing options. For the purpose of this work, I will discuss the following sequencing options:

2.3.5.1 Adjacency pairs

In conversation many turns occur as pairs (Liddicoat 2007). “A greeting is conventionally followed by another greeting, a farewell by a farewell, a question by an answer” (Schegloff and Sacks 1973 in Liddicoat 2007:106). These pairs are called adjacency pairs. The pairs are “ordered in such a way that the issue of the first part in a turn sets up an expectancy that the other will follow in the next turn” (Herman 1995: 84). The following examples are an illustration of adjacency pairs.

Example (16)

(A) *Question-Answer*

JOHN: *What time's it?*

BETTY: *Three uh clock.*

(B) *Greeting-Greeting*

AMY: *Hello*

JEAN: *Hi.*

(C) *Summons-Answer*

TERRY: *Hey Paul,*

PAUL: *Uh yeah*

(D) *Telling-Accepting*

JOHN: *I've jus' finished my las' exam*

BETTY: *That's great.*

(Liddicoat 2007: 107)

In all the examples above, “the first turn of the pair initiates some action and makes some next action relevant” (Liddicoat 2007: 107). The second turn is a response to the prior turn which completes the sequence.

2.3.5.2 Insertion sequence

There are cases where the adjacency pairs are not observable because they are “separated by intervening utterances which together make up what is called an

insertion sequence” (Pridham 2001: 28). The example below is an illustration of an insertion sequence; the exchanges are numbered for the purpose of analysis.

(Example 17)

- (1) A:** *Shall I wear the blue shoes?*
(2) B: *You’ve got the black ones*
(3) A: *They’re not comfortable*
(4) B: *Yeah, they’re the best then, wear the blue ones.*

(Pridham 2001: 28)

In example 17 above, “the topic of the insertion sequence is related to that of the main sequence in which it occurs and the question from the main sequence is returned to and answered after the insertion” (Pridham 2001: 28). This suggests that 1A is completed by its relevant 4B via another adjacency pair 2B3A. The original pair depends on the other, which causes the interactive business to take longer (Herman 1995).

2.3.5.3 Side sequence

Jefferson in Sudnow (1972: 294) defines a side sequence as occurrences that happen “in the course of some ongoing activity” where one might feel they “are not part of that activity but which appear to be in some sense relevant”. In the process of the activity there is a “‘break’ in contrast to ‘termination’” (*ibid.*) because the activity will resume. Side sequences, therefore, “break from the main business while some other subsidiary business is attended to” (Herman 1991: 103). The ‘break’ of the main talk to the subsidiary talk or sub-sequence “is used to rectify matters before the conversation resumes again” (Herman 1995: 85). To illustrate this, an example mentioned by Jefferson in Sudnow (1972: 295) follows:

Example (18)

(1)STEVEN: One, two, Three (pause) four, five, six, (pause) eleven, eight, nine, ten.

(2)SUSAN: “Eleven? eight, nine, ten?”

(3)STEVEN: Eleven, eight, nine ten.

(4)NANCY: “Eleven”?

(5)STEVEN: Seven, eight, nine, ten.

(6)SUSAN: That’s better.

Whereupon the game resumes

In example (18) above, three children are getting ready for a game called ‘Marco Polo’. The remark made by Susan in turn 2 led to the halting of the game so that attention is diverted away from it to the word ‘eleven’ which needs to be attended before the game resumes again.

2.3.5.4 Repair sequence

In conversation, problems of various kinds can occur, the processes available for speakers to deal with them are referred to as repair mechanisms. They “serve to check and monitor that the interaction is working as desired and that errors in production or problems with comprehension are being countered” (Herman 1995: 87). Liddicoat (2007: 175) identifies four types of repairs:

1. **Self-initiated self repair**, in which the speaker of the repair both indicates a problem in the talk and resolves the problem (see example 19 below).
2. **Self-initiated other repair**, in which the speaker of the repairable item indicates a problem in the talk, but the recipient resolves the problem (see example 20 below).

3. **Other-initiated self repair**, in which the recipient of the repairable item indicates a problem in the talk, but the speaker resolves the problem (see example 21 below).
4. **Other-initiated other repair**, in which the recipient of the repairable item not only indicates a problem in the talk but also resolves the problem (see example 22 below).
(*Ibid.*).

Below are illustrations of the four types of repairs:

Example (19)

***B:** Then more people will show up. Cuz they won't feel obligated to sell. Tuh buy.*

(Schegloff et. al. 1977. In Liddicoat 2007: 174)

Example (20)

***M:** Loes, do you have a calendar?*

***L:** Yeah.*

***M:** Do you have one that hangs on the wall?*

***L:** Oh you want one.*

***M:** Yeah*

(Schegloff 1992b in Liddicoat 2007: 176)

Example (21)

***A:** Hey the first time they stopped me from selling cigarettes was this morning.*

(1.0)

***B:** From selling cigarettes?*

***A:** From buying cigarettes.*

(Schegloff et. al. 1977 in Liddicoat 2007: 174)

Example (22)

JOHN: ... *What did Antigone do?*

WINSTON: *Antigone buried her brother Eteocles.*

JOHN: *No, no, no! Shit, Winston, when are you going to remember this thing? I told you, man, Antigone buried Polynices. The traitor! The one who I said was on our side. Right?*

WINSTON: *Right?*

(Fugard 1993: 200-201)

The sequencing strategies above all facilitate the structuring of the course of interaction. Their use may reveal amongst the participants:

1. Interactional cooperativeness
2. Conflict
3. Power relations.

These strategies will be clarified further in the subsequent chapters when the selected plays are analyzed.

2.4 Gender and dramatic dialogue

This section commences with an explanation of gender in which the contribution made by Cameron in Coates and Cameron (1988) and Thorne and Henley (1975) on the subject will be discussed. Lakoff (1975)'s concept of language and gender cannot be overlooked as it calls attention to the relationship between the two. Zimmerman and West have been accorded much attention because of their important contribution on conversation and the place of women in our society. Aston (1995)'s feminist approach to the study of theatre is essential in this study as it expresses a strong view of the representation of women as 'other' than men.

2.4.1 Gender

Gender is defined as comprising “the social, cultural, psychological constructs that are imposed upon the biological difference” (McElhinny in Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003). These ‘constructs’ are the traits that are assigned to men and women. Cameron in Coates Cameron (1988) argues that the studies of difference have been politicized: “Sex, like race, is an area of social relations where dominance has invariably been justified by difference” (*Ibid.*: 6). Cameron adds that male investigators have tirelessly sought the “differences between the sexes on which to base their unequal treatment of women” (*Ibid.*). In the 19th century, for example, Cameron asserts, stereotypical accounts explained dominance based on sex. It was argued that women should not possess civil rights because they were incapable of thinking in a logical manner. It was also alleged that higher education causes infertility. Although these claims are patently ridiculous, they are made within the bigger issue of men’s assertion of dominance over women.

Thorne and Henley (1975: 15) however, observe that on the issue of gender, that is, the difference between women and men, ‘difference’

is only part of the picture; the fact of male dominance-built into the economic, family, political and legal structures of society is also central to language and speech. Language helps to enact and transmit every type of inequality, including that between the sexes.

(Thorne and Henley 1975: 15)

Thorne and Henley are essentially arguing that the issue of difference between women and men is part of the bigger issue of male dominance. They observe that male dominance is not only evident in socio-political and economic structures, but it is also visibly clear in language and speech. One scholar who made a substantial contribution in this regard is Robin Lakoff. I consider it appropriate to begin a discussion of Lakoff’s view of gender and language.

2.4.2 Lakoff’s view on language and gender

As Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary in Coates and Cameron (1988: 74) assert, "everyone viewing the literature on sex differences in speech style will immediately notice that the work of Robin Lakoff is frequently invoked as a reference point". Lakoff argues that from the way language is used "by and about women" (Lakoff 1975: 1) one can gain an idea of the women's roles and positions in society. She is very clear that her work attempts to provide information with respect to how language use is indicative of the discrepancy between the roles of men and women. Lakoff contends that the way women are trained to use language as well as the way the general use of language treats them, is convincing evidence of the inequity that exists in our society. She concludes that both assertions are responsible for reducing women to object status and other demeaning positions.

2.4.2.1 Discrimination based on socialization

Discrimination against women could emanate from the way they have been socialized to use the language (Lakoff 1975). Little girls have been trained to use a language that is totally different from that used by boys. They have been taught, for example, not to use the stronger forms of language or 'talk rough' like boys. If they do, they would be "ostracized, scolded or made fun of" (*Ibid.*: 5). A similar assertion has been made by Kramer in Thorne and Henley (1975). She gives an example of what constitutes women's speech and makes reference to a body of opinions which she claims, has been collected from boys. She argues that boys hate girls who cannot stop talking, but prefer those who listen without interrupting and who pay attention to what they say. Girls, in other words, are not expected to be talkative. This socialization, according to Lakoff, might seem harmless but it raises very serious problems even though those responsible for socializing girls may be unaware of it. She explains that even if the girl child were to acquire this special language, she would still not be fully accepted by her society because the very same type of language will be used to keep her in an inferior position. In fact, at a later stage she would be blamed for being unable to communicate effectively.

According to Lakoff (1975), those girls who managed to acquire tertiary education find themselves being bilingual. They learn to use the women's special language and the neutral language. The former is the one they have been socialized to use which forbids the use of stronger forms of language associated with men. The latter is learnt at school; women use it when they are in class or with other learned people. Lakoff also comments that like any other bilingual person, the girls may never be mistresses of both languages. She states that the girl may never "feel comfortable using either, and be certain that she is using the right one in the right person" (*Ibid.*: 6). Lakoff observes that:

...the overall effect of 'women's language', - meaning both language restricted in use to women and language descriptive of women alone – is this: it submerges a woman's personal identity, by denying her the means of expressing herself strongly, on the one hand, and encouraging expressions that suggest triviality in subject-matter and uncertainty about it; and when a woman is being discussed, by treating her as an object-sexual or otherwise-but never a serious person with individual views.

(Lakoff 1975: 7)

Lakoff contends that the effect of the above "discrepancies is that women are systematically denied access to power on the grounds that they are not capable of holding it" (*Ibid.*) as they cannot strongly express themselves. This is a typical example of how women are discriminated against by the language they use. They are socialized into using the 'special language' which is associated with femininity and the society later uses it to keep them in subordinate positions.

2.4.2.2 Discrimination based on general language use

According to Lakoff (1975: 8), "women's language shows up in all levels of the grammar of English". There are differences in the "choice and frequency of lexical items" (*Ibid.*) and even in the "situation in which syntactic rules are performed" (*Ibid.*). She maintains, for example, that the words 'mauve' and 'lavender' are

considered to be feminine lexical items. If a man is heard using them it might be concluded that he was mocking a woman or he was a homosexual. Lakoff observes that the issue is not the words per se, but the fact that men consider such topics as womanly, and totally irrelevant to the male dominated world. Such lexical difference, therefore, shows that men diminish women's position in society by, for instance, making the latter do things that they believe are inessential.

Other forms of disparities that exist are evident in the different ways in which men and women express anger. Lakoff again argues that since "as children women are encouraged to be little ladies" (Lakoff 1975: 11), they are not expected to speak loudly and angrily. Showing temper is tolerated in little boys; it is not expected that they will be docile. This is evident, according to Lakoff, in the use of certain expletives. Some seem natural when used by men but not by women. She calls them 'stronger' and 'weaker' expletives. Lakoff illustrates this by citing the words 'shit' and 'oh dear'. The former is the 'stronger' expletive which is more acceptable when used by men whereas the latter is the 'weaker' one that is part of women's speech. She further explains that beside the use of expletives, disparities exist even in a group of adjectives. Some adjectives would be used by both sexes but some are largely confined to women's speech. Below is an illustration of the use of adjectives.

Example (23)

| Neutral adjectives | Women only adjectives |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Great | Adorable |
| Terrific | Charming |
| Cool | Sweet |
| Neat | Lovely |
| | Divine |

(Lakoff 1975: 12)

Lakoff states that it would be very damaging for a man to use the 'women only' column though women may freely use the neutral column. This suggests that

“women are denied equality partially for linguistic reasons...” (Lakoff 1975: 11). She explains that the ideas expressed by such words do not exist in men’s world of dominance.

The peculiarity of women’s speech is evident even in syntax (Lakoff 1975). Lakoff argues that women use the tag question formation more than men. A tag is “a midway between an outright statement and a yes-no question: it is less assertive than the former, but more confident than the latter” (Lakoff 1975: 15). It is used when a speaker is making an assertion but he or she is not certain about the facts. Lakoff notes that in the tag ‘John is here, isn’t he’?, it is clear that the speaker is expecting a positive answer. All that is sought is confirmation. An example, below, is used for the same effect:

Example (24)

- a) When will dinner be ready?
- b) Oh...around six o’clock...?

(Lakoff 1975: 17)

In example 24 above, Lakoff (1975: 17) writes, “it is as though (b) were saying six o’clock if that’s ok with you, if you agree”. Kramer in Thorne and Henley (1975: 48) comments that in this particular case the woman is “asked a question for which she alone holds the information”, but she turns it into a question. Lakoff thinks (a) has to confirm (b)’s response because (b) gives the impression of not being certain about the time. In this situation we discover that speaker (b) fails to state an opinion clearly and firmly; the consequence of this is that it could be used to make generalizations about women. The woman’s lack of confidence in what she says could be used as evidence that women are not to be taken seriously and cannot not be entrusted with any responsibilities.

Beside the above claim based on syntax, the use of euphemistic terms when referring to women reflects a social inequity in the position of women (Lakoff 1975). These seem to be used “when the occupation is considered embarrassing or demeaning” (*Ibid.*: 20). Some of the examples used by Lakoff are the words

'housewife' and 'girl'. She argues that the term 'housewife', which refers to women's principal role, is sometimes used euphemistically, while most work related terms are not connected to any euphemisms. Similarly, the word 'girl' is usually used as a substitute for 'woman'. It emphasizes the concept of immaturity because it has connotations of 'youth' and 'inexperience'. According to Lakoff this suggests that a woman is childish and inexperienced; therefore, she cannot be allowed to take serious responsibilities.

On another note, Lakoff contends that in some cultures a woman achieves status through her father or her husband or lover's position. She declares that these facts are linguistically proven and provides the following examples:

Example (25)

- a) He is a professional.
- b) She is a professional.

(Lakoff 1975: 30)

In the illustration above, Lakoff argues that in example (a), the conclusion would be that the man is a doctor or lawyer but in example (b) it would be automatically assumed that the woman is a prostitute. For Lakoff these examples show clearly that "a man is defined in the serious world by what he does, a woman by her sexuality, that is in terms of one particular aspect of her relationship to men" (*Ibid.*). To further prove that women are identified in terms of the men they are related to, Lakoff remarks, women are referred to as 'John's wife' or 'Harry's girl friend'. This suggests that "women are given their identities in our society by virtue of their relationship with men, not vice versa" (*Ibid.*: 35). In other words, women's identities are suppressed.

Lakoff has revealed that there is a difference between English as used by men and women; and that the inequity in the position of men and women in our society is reflected in linguistic terms. She suggests that an analysis of language could help to identify these disparities. Zimmerman and West's views on this aspect are discussed in the section below.

2.4.3 Zimmerman and West's view on sex roles, language and social interaction

Zimmerman and West are very explicit about the relationship between gender and language. In their work in Thorne and Henley (1975: 106) they state that reviews of "studies of sex roles and language patterns suggest that various features of language and speech furnish the resources for male dominance". Speech patterns which include "syntactic, semantic, phonological and intonational structures function to communicate the cultural and social meanings that cluster around sex roles" (*Ibid.*). However, their focus, which is the anchor of this study, is their work on the role of language in the organization of social interaction, especially the characteristics of interaction between men and women. In identifying these characteristics they applied Sacks et al (1974)'s model which has already been discussed in the preceding sections. First, they report, they dealt with the collection, transcription and analysis of data. A summary of their findings follows:

- a) There is a marked asymmetry between males and females with respect to interruptions, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, with respect to overlap. Interruptions are a violation of a speaker's right to complete a turn.
- b) Even after repeated interruptions, women express no complaint, while when the interrupting male completes his utterance, the female typically pauses before speaking.
- c) Retarded minimal responses and interruptions function as topic control mechanisms. Minimal responses are signals of non support for the continued development of a topic.
- d) Repeated interruptions of a speaker by her male partner also seem to be followed by a topic change. The interruption appears to restrict the rights of the person being interrupted to continue to the developing topic.

(Zimmerman and West in Thorne and Henley 1975: 116-125)

In their concluding remarks, Zimmerman and West suggest that generally “males assert an asymmetrical right to control topics and do so without evident repercussions” (*Ibid.*: 125). They observe that:

Men deny equal status to women as conversational partners with respect to rights to the full utilization turns and support for the development of topics...Just as male dominance is exhibited through male control of macro-institutions in society, it is also exhibited through control of at least a part of one macro-institution.

(Zimmerman and West in Thorne and Henley 1975: 125)

The above argument has been established to be valid by other scholars. For example, Herman (1995) also comments that men in mixed party talks have been found to control interactional resources such as the floor. Similarly, Soskin and John (1963) cited by Herman (1995: 256) assert that “in wife-husband interactions women perform as the less dominant partners - they facilitate interactions rather than take the dominant role themselves, allowing men to do most of the talking”. DeFrancisco (1991) cited by Herman (1995) comments that even in cases where women attempted to talk more, and raise topics, they still did not obtain interactional support because they only received minimal responses.

Like Zimmerman and West, Herman (1995: 256) points out that “the use of the floor in terms of interruptions, and turn length, in particular can be deeply manipulated in sexual terms...”. Men are able to manipulate these interactional resources, in other words, to disempower women. Herman (1995: 258) further declares that even professionally qualified women who occupy high social positions in Britain are faced with the same challenge, of being discriminated against linguistically in institutional settings. She argues that their status does not advantage them in interacting with men, especially when it comes to floor management. “Research into doctor-patient interactions reveal that, although doctors in general interrupt patients more, female doctors were interrupted more often than their male counterparts when the patient was a man” (*Ibid.*). Even in

cases where “the boss was female; she was subjected to more challenge for the floor by her male subordinates than the male bosses were” (*Ibid.*). This suggests that in mixed party talks, women are disadvantaged, the implication being that the roles and positions of women in our societies can be determined through social interaction.

2.5. Aston’s feminist approach to the study of theatre

According to Aston (1995: 35) “feminist scholarship in recent years has been centrally concerned with the theoretical discourses of representation articulated through the texts of a number of cultural fields: art, cinema, media, advertising, theatre, etc [*sic*]”. Aston comments that this has led to feminist analysis of representation identifying “the oppressive discourse of engendered representation which constructs and positions ‘woman’ as ‘the other-from-man’” (*Ibid.*). Bahri in Lazarus (2004) states that the term ‘representation’ is best described by Ella Shohatin in her essay, “The struggle over representation: Casting, Coalition, and the Politics of Identification”. Shohatin observes this means having representatives who will speak for one. Those who are represented or spoken for are the ‘other’, the socially subordinate, and in the case of gender, are women. They are represented by men and consequently do not have a voice. Because the study’s main question asks how dramatic dialogue depicts the positions of women in Zakes Mda’s selected plays, it is proper to look at Aston’s work on some of the feminist conclusions pertaining to the positioning of women as ‘other’.

2.5.1. Silencing of women

In order for one to clearly understand the position of women as the silenced subject, it is necessary to begin the discussion with Case (1989a)’s view on the construction of the human subject. Case (1989a) cited in Aston (1995) recognizes the influence of psychoanalysis in this regard. She uses the Lacanian model, specifically the ‘mirror stage’, to explain the position of the female subject. As Herman (1995) observes, according to Lacan in the mirror stage the child

associates with the image in the mirror. She sees the image as 'a self' or 'myself' which suggests that subjectivity begins by gazing into the mirror. Through the gaze the child subsequently creates an imaginary relation with the object image. Herman (1995: 272) explains that the gaze then extends to "the gaze of the 'Other' or others who confirm a solidity, albeit fictional, for the self". On the whole, this implies that 'subjectivity' or 'self' is constructed by the image in the mirror, the gaze of the 'Other'. Case, therefore, expands this theory to explain the position of the female subject. For Case (1989a) cited in Aston (1995), in the mirror stage the female subject splits up into two separate beings and observes herself as the male-identified subject and part of his subjectivity. She also observes herself as the woman who sees her own subject position as both identified by male and female. According to Case this indicates that the female subject cannot exist as a whole, independent subject because she is aware that the male's "story is not her story, and therefore enters the doors of the discourse in male drag" (*Ibid.*: 37). She is interpreted in terms of men. In short, the female subject is silenced.

In her work about the silencing of women, Aston (1995) also uses Belsey's study of Renaissance drama (1991). According to Belsey the subject of liberal humanism has a speaking voice. The subject is independent and makes her own choices. On the contrary, regarding women in Britain, for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were unable to "speak, to take up a subject position in discourse" (*Ibid.*: 37). They were silenced, the only action expected of them was to submit to the authority of the male subjects.

2.5.2. The object positioning of the female subject

De Lauretis cited in Aston (1995: 39) describes the female subject as "inactive, defined only in terms of the male (as daughter, as a wife to be)". The female subject, in other words, is 'spoken for' by the 'other'. Aston points out that De Lauretis pursues this view in terms of Lotman's (1979) work on mythical-textual mechanics which shows structuration as reflecting the interests of men while women are associated with the 'other or non-person. Aston furnishes a summary of Lotman's work in the following terms:

The hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, a matrix and matter.

(Aston 1995: 40)

Aston explains that the subject in the above narrative is “male and its discourse is phallogocentric” (*Ibid.*). It expresses the experiences of the male while the female is eclipsed by the male narratives. The female subject cannot assume a subject position because she exists in relation to the male subject. She is, for example, a plot space, a topos, which actually suggests that she is a device or idea that keeps the series of events in the story moving forward. The female is in fact an object of male desire.

The French feminist, Helene Cixous’s contribution in this field is examined in the following section.

2.5.2.1. Cixous’s argument on objectification of women

Cixous in Aston (1995) critiques the woman as an object of male exchange, of male desire. She rejects the “logo-/phallo-centric structures which divide up the world according to sexual difference” (*Ibid.*: 45). Cixous calls for women to liberate themselves from gender based inequality. She says they need to make their own choices: to achieve this she suggests that women need to claim their ‘voice’. Cixous observes that a woman’s voice has always been present before the division of the world according to sexual difference. She blames psychoanalysis’ methods of constructing the human subject since these position a woman as ‘other from man’. Cixous is supported by Irigaray, cited in Aston (1995), who contends that the Western traditions of philosophy and psychoanalysis have lessened a woman to becoming a negative, non-subject, non-speaking position. Cixous, however, emphasizes that this can be corrected if women are able to break away from the symbolic order that denies them an active subject position. Cixous declares that

since their subjugation is imposed by language, they should violently break away from being spoken for and take their own subject position.

2.6. Conclusion

To reiterate: the focus of this study is to explore gender in relation to dramatic dialogue. Specifically, I intend to investigate gender relations as depicted in Zakes Mda's plays and I believe that the discussion on theoretical frameworks provides adequate directives for the detailed analysis of Mda's plays to follow in the next chapters. This chapter offered an introductory discussion of Herman's work on dramatic dialogue, while Cameron in Coates and Cameron (1988), Thorne and Henley (1975)'s contributions on gender relations have also been mentioned. A discussion of Robin Lakoff's (1975) view on language and women's place has been used to reveal the social discrepancies in the position of men and women in our society as they are reflected in linguistic disparities.

Zimmerman and West have also concluded that male dominance can be detected through conversational analysis. Woods in Coates and Cameron (1988: 141) concurs with the assertion that "power and status of conversational participants have a strong and predictable effect upon the way in which interaction is organized". From Zimmerman and West's study, it is evident that an analysis of conversational structure reveals the asymmetrical power relations between men and women. Aston (1995) has also given examples of the oppressive discourse of engendered representation which constructs and positions women as 'other', an issue which will be explored further when the plays are analyzed.

In the following chapters I will apply the theoretical insights regarding gender and dramatic dialogue to my analyses of Zakes Mda's three postcolonial plays.

CHAPTER 3: *THE NUN'S ROMANTIC STORY*

3.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed the theoretical frameworks for understanding and analyzing gender and dramatic dialogue. These will now be used for the analysis of *The Nun's Romantic Story*, the first of the three plays that the current study seeks to investigate. The chapter begins with a summary of the play below (point 3.2.), together with an overview of reviews and previous analyses of the play. These will be followed by a discussion of male dominance (see 3.3. below) and the strategies used to show how men assert dominance over women. The subordination of women is dealt with in section 3.4. where issues on stereotyping, violence against women and objectification are discussed in detail. Section 3.5.'s focus is placed on how the playwright has empowered women through his female protagonist despite the challenges the former encounter in male dominated societies. In all the sections, the different frameworks will be used to expose these gender issues.

3.2. The Nun's Romantic Story

The Nun's Romantic Story was first performed at the Civic Theatre, Johannesburg, on 23 March 1995. It is set in an unspecified third world country. Mda in Steel (2007: 157) explains that:

The play was influenced by events in Lesotho when the state of emergency was declared in 1970. It is a loose composite of real events that happened there during that period, and people who actually lived then. Many readers have commented that these events are very similar to events that happened in a number of Latin American countries.

The work centres on a young Catholic nun, Anna-Maria, who shoots and kills the General who had commanded the soldiers responsible for the rape of her mother and murder of her family many years previously. The soldiers were on a mission to seize power in a coup d'état following the democratic elections that would have transferred power to a radical political party. The nun steals a gun from a local priest and shoots the General as he is about to receive communion. The play is based on the legal arguments concerning the nun's defence in a court of law. With such a plot, the "play has been variously described as a story of brutality in the name of democracy" (Mda 1996: xxiii-xxiv). Steel (2007: 160), however, notes that the title of the play also indicates that the nun has a romantic story to tell, that of her relationship with Pampiri, the Geography teacher. This assertion is confirmed by Pampiri himself in scene 7:

PAMPIRI: *[To the audience] I don't know how to tell you this...I mean in a way that you won't misinterpret it, but a special friendship developed between Sister Anna-Maria and myself. A very special relationship. Okay, let me admit it at once, I was falling hopelessly in love with her.*
(Mda 1996: 98)

It can be said that Mda creates characters the way he sees them. He specifically points out that:

I write about women the way I write about all characters. I do not make a conscious effort to portray them any differently. What comes out of that

exercise then is not contrived. When I write about women it is as I have observed them, and I write about them naturally.

(Mda in Naidoo 1997: 260)

His encounter with a Sister Cathy while he was serving as deputy head teacher at Mabathoana High School greatly influenced his creativity. He admits in his memoir, *Sometimes there is a Void*, where he describes his relationship with Sister Cathy, that their relationship “was never consummated, except in a play...” (Mda 2011: 234): the one I am examining. Mda’s depiction of the woman character, the nun, in other words, is based on his experience.

The Nun’s Romantic Story has received much attention from a number of critics and reviewers. In “Gender on the Frontline: A Comparative Study of the Female Voice in Selected Plays of Athol Fugard and Zakes Mda” (2002) and “Harmony of Voice: Women Characters in the Plays of Zakes Mda” (2005), Lombardozzi discusses the ambiguity of the nun in the play. She sees the nun not as a representative of “purity and Christian love” (Lombardozzi 2005: 220), but as “representative of a system which dehumanizes rather than uplifts its people” (*Ibid.*). Political issues, she contends, have been successfully “foregrounded at the expense of feminist issues, as the focus is less on the nun as a woman as it is an indictment of a political system” (*Ibid.*). The political regime in question is that of Prime Minister Jonathan of Lesotho¹. Ebewo refers to this government as arrogant and self-opinionated because of the way the soldiers brutalized the people. Dunton, in his review of *Four Plays* confirms this viewpoint when he describes Mda as being highly ambitious in being able to use the character of the nun to depict the violence inflicted on communities who opposed the ruling party in Lesotho in the 70s (*Mail and Guardian*: 7 May 1997). Mda has used the nun, whose character

¹Ebewo (2009:27) in his article, “Satire: A Shifting Paradigm in ZakesMda’s Dramaturgy” explains that after the 1965 elections which put the Basutoland National Party (BNP) into power “another democratic election was conducted in 1970, with the BNP being assured of success. But the electorate, not fully satisfied with the government of Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan, voted *en masse* for the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), giving them a resounding victory. In an utter abuse of democracy, The Prime Minister refused to hand over power to the BCP, declaring a state of emergency in which hundreds of protestors were tortured and killed”.

in real life is associated with saintliness and godliness to portray the ruthlessness of the ruling party. In order to reveal the intensity of the pain inflicted on people he has successfully turned the expected warm heartedness character of a nun to a violent and vengeful character. Bell (2009: 31) strikes the same note when he suggests that “while these national and international aspects frame the tale, the key issue lies on the personal level, the right of the nun to avenge her family”.

Like the above critics, Steel (2007) views *The Nun's Romantic Story* as essentially addressing political issues. She comments that the play expresses Mda's disappointment in the world powers that aimed at “maintaining their spheres of influence whether at home or abroad” (*Ibid.*: 159), as this compromises the political stability of those countries. Steel bases this claim on S.C, a character in the play, when he says: “...but in the Third World we were quite prepared to subvert democracy to safeguard our interests...The western governments instructed me to strongly urge your President not to hand over power...” (Mda in Steel 2007: 159). Steel also describes the play as being a tool to question the role of the church in politics and notes Mda's intolerance to “religious hypocrisy” (*Ibid.*: 161) which is expressed through his protagonist Lawrence Pampiri.

In “Harmony of Voice: Women Characters in the Plays of Zakes Mda”, Lombardozzi asserts that *The Nun's Romantic story* not only deals with politics, but it also handles gender issues such as the marginalization of women and achieves this through the analysis of the female protagonist. She identifies the detention of Anna-Maria, the nun, as a metaphor which represents the restricted lives of women in this country and further demonstrates that on several occasions in the play the lawyers attempt to tarnish her image “as a human being by accusing her of being insane, emotionally stunted, obsessed and of hearing voices claiming to communicate with the virgin Mary” (*Ibid.*: 221). They even claim to have the authority to describe how she feels declaring that she cannot be happy as circumstances do not allow her to be. Lombardozzi reiterates that according to the patriarchal belief system men want to assert their dominance over the woman.

Despite her insightful discussion into marginalization of women, Lombardoizzi points out that from a feminist point of view, “the play appears to flaunt masculine aspirations such as the desire for power and patriarchal domination” (Lombardoizzi 2005: 219). She observes that the title of the play is deceptive as the play’s focus is not necessarily on the male’s view point regarding the story of the nun. For her, the work is about how Mda has used the male characters to tell the story of the nun. Lombardoizzi asserts that this undermines the implied dominance of men over women. Mda, who presents his female characters with courage and determination, qualifies the claim by ending the play with the disappearance of a woman character, Anna-Maria, thus leaving the men with no room to make choices for her. As Lombardoizzi notes, the undermined status of men is further revealed by the male characters’ non-violent reaction to her defiance. She adds that Mda also allows Anna-Maria to take up her subject position by giving her a voice to confront her oppressors.

The above review has revealed some of the approaches to the text that could usher the reader towards a deeper understanding of the play. However, my approach does provide a wider perspective because it focuses on gender and its relatedness to dramatic discourse. As Herman asserts, it is through the analysis of the characters’ utterances or verbal behaviour that one discovers clues to interpret the situation and character; I am therefore confident that the depiction of dramatic discourse in *The Nun’s Romantic Story* will contribute to the above critical assessment of the changing positions of women in society as depicted in this play.

I found scene 1 to have perfectly introduced the research focus of the study, that is, gender relations as represented in the dramatic discourse. Right from the beginning of the play, we are introduced to Anna-Maria, the woman character and Pampiri, the male character. Anna-Maria is concerned with her personal achievement, owning a guitar, something which she had been denied by the religious structures in the past. Pampiri on the other hand, is concerned with the secret relationship he enjoyed with Anna-Maria, of which the other teachers never took notice. They view the world around them differently. Anna-Maria is celebrating

her achievement of ownership while Pampiri is revealing his sexual attraction to her inspite of the fact that she is a nun and hence, not expected to engage in sexual relationships. Pampiri intends to violate her right to remain celibate, thus denying her an opportunity to celebrate her own choice to be a nun. The introductory scene in other words does give a picture of gender issues in the play, where sex difference becomes a determining factor for one sex group to claim dominance over the other. At this point it is fitting to begin the discussion of male dominance in the play.

3.3. Male Dominance

Since the play essentially deals with Sister Anna-Maria's right to avenge her family's murder, the fact of male dominance is demonstrated by the two lawyers, Malibu and Senior Counsel, who represent the political leaders who were part of the system that destroyed her family. They are endowed with the responsibility of defending Anna-Maria in a court of law. Our first encounter with the lawyers is in scene 2 where they are debating their involvement in the political history of Lesotho.

(1) MALIBU: *(reading) "No one knew exactly what they wanted, but everyone knew that immediately after the elections the government had declared a state of emergency throughout the country".*

(2) S.C.: *You had lost the elections, so you declared a state of emergency instead of handing over power to the party that had won.*

(3) MALIBU: *We had wanted to hand over. I was the President's legal advisor at the time. He was quite willing to hand over, but he was advised against it.*

(4) S.C.: *You advised him against it then?*

(5) MALIBU: *You cannot put your guilt on me, Prof. You did. I as the*

President's adviser, merely advised him to take your advice.

(6) S.C.: *So I did, did I? Of course. Forgive me, old chap, for the lapse of memory. You see, I have had a lot of adventures in the international political theatre. You understand, of course, that the advice I gave at the time was given in good faith on behalf of my principals, namely West Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. We felt very strongly at the time that the opposition party was under the influence of the eastern bloc(...)*

(Mda 1996: 82-83)

In the above extract the turn change option used is current speaker selecting next, which creates an A-B-A-B alternating pattern. In turn 1, the historical nature of what Malibu is reading allows S.C. to take the turn because he is also part of the history under discussion. Within the extract the lawyers select each other by the pronoun 'you', 'name' and through the use of questions. On the whole, turn change is smoothly achieved as one speaker speaks, stops, and the next speaker speaks, stops, and so on. The smooth turn change facilitates the depiction of the history of the country in question and also creates equal power relations between the two characters.

Turn distribution is more or less equal except for turn 6 where S.C.'s turn is longer compared to the other turns. S.C. uses his turns to sarcastically reveal the events of the past 20 years and the interference of western powers in Third World politics. His turns also include questions which are full of mockery: for example, in turn 4, "*you advised him against it then*" and in turn 6, "*So I did, did I...*"? In turn 6, S.C. exercises extended speech rights which establish him as the dominant party. "The burden of being the target of speech and the role of the listener is placed heavily on the dominated male..." (Herman 1995: 256), who is Malibu in this case. Malibu is the less dominant speaker probably because of his lower occupational rank when compared to S.C.. The former is an advocate or barrister from abroad while Malibu is just an attorney. In his speech, S.C. reveals that he is experienced in international politics and that he had been working on behalf of his principals,

namely West Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States. Even though S.C.'s long turn awards him dominance, the other interactive strategies which include the turn change option and turn distribution, as mentioned above, accord both of them almost the same power position in the conversation.

The topic management, another strategy used in the extract, also indicates that the characters have symmetrical power relations. They develop the topic of politics jointly and collaboratively. The topic strategy shows both characters as being well informed as regards the political situation they are addressing since they are part of the history they are talking about. The direction in which the talk is propelled, for example, that what they did in the past was done "*in good faith*" (Mda 1996: 83), reveals that they will use their dominant political status to attempt to place the female protagonist in the play in a subservient position. When handling her case they will use the same historical bias. Woods in Coates and Cameron (1988: 141) asserts that "power and status of the conversational participant has a strong and predictable effect upon the way in which interaction is organized". The power and dominance of S.C. and Malibu in the play are revealed through their interaction with or about the female protagonist, to which the emphasis of the analysis now turns.

3.3.1. Exclusion as a strategy for dominance

Exclusion is a dramatic strategy which is a consequence of a distribution pattern adopted by the dramatist. This distribution pattern causes a speaker to wait for a turn while the floor is used by other speakers. Herman has demonstrated that "how the turn rights are distributed in the who-speaks-to-whom, who-is-not-spoken-to dimension can be consequential" (Herman 1995: 114). In the following extract the lawyers are debating Sister Anna-Maria's case; she happens to "follow the... dialogue with interest" (Mda 1996: 84) but is denied participation in the conversation.

...Sister Anna-Maria quietly sits on her First Space bench, and will follow the following dialogue with interest.

- (1) **VILLA:** *You will defend her, Mr A.C. Malibu. You promised you will.*
- (2) **MALIBU:** *I must admit that at first I was quite reluctant to defend her. I mean after what she did.*
- (3) **S.C.:** *Alleged to have done.*
- (4) **MALIBU:** *Well, we all know she did it. She says so herself.*
- (5) **S.C.:** *It's still an allegation.*
- (6) **MALIBU:** *That's just a legal nicety, of course.*
- (7) **VILLA:** *The church is quite prepared to support her at all costs.*

(Mda 1996: 84)

In the above extract the turn pattern employed attempts the A-B-C-B-C-B-A or Villa-Malibu-S.C.-Malibu-S.C.-Malibu-Villa. The turn taking pattern is constructed fundamentally in line with two options, current speaker selects next, and next speaker self selects. In turn 1, Villa selects next speaker, Malibu, by name who then takes turn 2. S.C. self selects in turn 3. In fact, he turn grabs since he initiates himself into the interaction without being licensed to do so and with the intention of shifting the direction of the talk away from Villa to himself. After the exchanges between S.C. and Malibu in turn 4-6, Villa turn grabs, in turn 7, bringing back the topic he wants addressed. He is concerned about Sister Anna-Maria and reveals that the church is prepared to support her. The turn change options adopted exclude Anna-Maria from the conversation even though her affairs constitute the main part of the discussion.

The turn distribution pattern privileges the male characters because the floor and participation rights are confined only to Villa, Malibu, and S.C. Anna-Maria "is doubly excluded by the distribution of turns and by the talk itself" (Herman 1995: 115). She is denied speaking rights and also spoken about in the third person despite her presence in the dialogue.

The sequencing strategies used also highlight her exclusion. The extract begins with an adjacency pair, comment-comment where the comment made by Villa in turn 1 calls forth Malibu's turn. However, the turn grab by S.C. in turn 3 "complicates the structure of the basic pair" (*Ibid.*:85) as the embeddings formed

from turn 3-6 prolong the course of the interactions. Turn 3, “Alleged to have done” is completed by its relevant turn 6, “That’s just a legal nicety, of course” via another adjacency pair, turn 4 and 5. In this extract the extended sequences not only isolate Sister Anna-Maria, “they fracture the norm of equality that underlies conversational exchange...” (*Ibid.*: 130) since the conversational topic amongst the participants has everything to do with her and she is, moreover, following the dialogue with interest.

Even though turn change, turn distribution, topic and sequencing strategies are all involved in the construction of action in the extract as well as in exposing the asymmetrical power relations between the male characters and Anna-Maria, the topic strategy proves to be the most effective in portraying the fact of male dominance. Villa’s turn 1, introduces the first topic, on defending Sister Anna-Maria, and he selects Malibu who takes the turn and maintains the topic. S.C. turn grabs in turn 3 and changes the direction of the topic but the focus is still placed on the affairs of Anna-Maria. Their topic is actually a discussion on defending and supporting her. This is emphasized by Villa in turn 1 when he asserts, “*You will defend her, Mr A.C. Malibu. You promised you will*”, and also in turn 7, “*The church is quite prepared to support her at all costs*”. Although support is expressed for Anna-Maria, which could be regarded as positive, there is also an implication at this point that she is incapable of looking after or defending herself. They assume that she cannot handle her situation and hence that their support is needed. The argument is similar to Lakoff’s claim that a woman is “forced to exist only as a reflection in the eyes of others” (Lakoff 1975: 27) because “she does not, cannot, do anything in her own behalf...” (*Ibid.*). The talk perpetuates patriarchal dominance and relegates the female protagonist to a minor position where she is incapable of taking responsibility for her own actions.

3.3.2. Domination of conversational interaction

In her study Herman (1995: 264) writes,

Men more easily appropriate the control aspect of interaction than women, the contexts and processes of interaction often disfavour women, female communicative competences and preferences being underrated and often suppressed in mixed sex talk.

The following extract is a portrayal of a courtroom scene where we experience the manifestation of the authority of S.C. over Anna-Maria through interactional control.

(1) S.C.: *You understand that you are under oath?*

(2) ANNA-MARIA *(raises her hand): So help me God.*

(3) S.C.: *You were nine years old at the time?*

(4) ANNA-MARIA: *Yes, my Lord.*

(5) S.C.: *And you were a very happy little girl.*

(6) ANNA-MARIA: *I am still very happy.*

(7) S.C.: *You want to be happy, Anna-Maria, but you cannot be happy.*

Circumstances do not allow you to be happy.

(8) ANNA-MARIA: *They have decreed that I should not be happy, but I decided to defy that. I am happy your Lordship. No argument in the world will convince me that I am not.*

(9) S.C.: *We digress again. We must keep to the point, Anna-Maria. We do not want irrelevancies to cloud our evidence. It was the evening, you say, and you were sitting at table having supper?*

(Mda 1996: 86)

In the extract above, turn change is effected by current speaker selecting next. Throughout the extract S.C. selects Anna-Maria either by the pronoun 'you' or by name. Turn change on the whole is smoothly achieved because one speaker speaks, stops, and next speaker speaks, stops, and so on. Both characters listen to each other without any interruptions and "exchange offences" (Culpeper et al 1988: 30) as in turn 6-8, "in equal measure, promptly and smoothly" (*Ibid.*).

However, the smooth turn change does not indicate harmony between the characters. It reveals equality in terms of handling the conflict before them.

Turn order reveals equal distribution of turns amongst the characters. Neither of them has been privileged by turn distribution. Similarly, the turn sizes point to equal power relations because the length of turns is almost equal.

While the turn change option and turn distribution seem to award both characters equal power relations, a close analysis of the sequencing strategy and topic exposes S.C.'s interactional control and assertion of dominance over Anna-Maria. The first two pairs, turn 1-4, are Question-Answer sequences in adjacency pairing while turn 5-8 comprise the last Comment-Comment adjacency pairing. In the first pair, turn 1-2, S.C. initiates the court scene action by posing a question that requires Anna-Maria in the second turn to respond by taking an oath, thus completing the action initiated. During turn 3-4, the Question-Answer pair develops from the first pair as the focus is still on the court scene. The pair plays an "expository function" (Herman: 1995: 128) because S.C. forces Anna-Maria to reveal that she was nine years old when her mother was raped and the family murdered. Up to this point, the sequencing strategy is establishing the power relations between the two characters as largely asymmetrical because S.C. is the one initiating talk. "The right to initiate the exchanges" (*Ibid.*: 134) dominantly belongs to him, and he "...decides what does and does not count as an answer" (*Ibid.*). This is clearly indicated by the Comment-Comment pair in turn 5-6 where S.C. seems unsatisfied by Anna-Maria's response, "*I am still very happy*", because by her not providing a 'yes' answer, her defiance of his interactional control is revealed. S.C.'s "dominance is furthered" (*Ibid.*) when he retaliates in turn 7, "No, you want to be happy, Anna-Maria, but you cannot be happy. Circumstances do not allow you to be happy". He even tells her what her own feelings must be.

Even though Anna-Maria refuses S.C.'s authority over her in turn 8, nonetheless the manipulation of the topic strategy awards him dominance because the topic control is generally in his hands. He is the one who gives Anna-Maria the turns. In fact, he dictates the terms of the conversation. In turn 9, he issues a warning,

stopping her from mentioning what he claims is irrelevant. By doing so he is driving the direction of the talk. He “decides... which topic will be the focus of their interaction” (Herman 1995: 134) when he says, “we digress again, we must keep to the point...”. On the whole, the extract has demonstrated S.C as authoritative. His act of controlling the talk and topic reveals “the silencing of women both in the theatre and in society” (Aston 1995: 17).

3.4. Subordination of women

3.4.1 Stereotyping of women

According to Cameron Debora (1988: 8), to stereotype someone is

to interpret their behavior, personality and so on in terms of a set of common-sense attributions which are applied to whole groups...The attributions are over generalised, even when they are not absolutely false they are only partially true, since they imply that a characteristic in question is found in all members of the group in question. Individual differences are best overlooked and at worst denied...

Stereotyping is mostly experienced by smaller groups, especially those living on the margins of society. In terms of gender, Cameron has observed that women tend to be the ones who are stereotyped. A typical example is evidenced by the extract below:

(1) S.C.: *Don't worry, father. She will be defended.*

(2) MALIBU: *Yes. That's why I got him. (pointing at S.C.) He is a Senior Counsel from abroad. He will handle this case very brilliantly.*

(3) VILLA: *I am sure he will.*

(4) MALIBU: *He was my professor at the university when I studied law. That's why I call him Prof. I have all the confidence in him.*

(5) VILLA: *She does not seem to understand the gravity of her actions. She is innocent.*

[Anna-Maria suddenly stands up, and for the first time she is angry. Only briefly though, for the anger melts into a smile. Her smile is not a mechanical one that is only on her lips. It is on her eyes as well, in her face and in her voice.]

(6) Anna-Maria: *No! I am not innocent. It is an utter insult to refer to me in those terms. I cannot be innocent. I refuse to be innocent. And if anyone of you wants to order that I be granted freedom, I will resist with all my might. [The lawyers are astounded. Father Villa gives her a saintly reassuring smile. Lights gradually go down on First and Second Spaces until black.]*

(7) S.C.: *What I want to know is, was her action a political statement?*

(8) MALIBU: *I don't understand, Prof.*

(9) S.C.: *Was this a political act, or was she driven by other passions? Are we at one stage going to be required to advance political arguments in our defence? In short, are we characters in a political play?*

(10) MALIBU: *Our defence is obsession.*

(11) S.C.: *Obsession? What kind of defence is that? Insanity. That's the only defence I can see here.*

(Mda 1996: 85-86)

The turn taking pattern in the extract above is constructed in line with current speaker selects next, self selection or turn grabbing options. In turn 1, S.C. selects Father Villa by name but Malibu self selects and interacts briefly with Villa, assuring him that Anna-Maria's case is in good hands with S.C. After Malibu and Villa's exchanges, Anna-Maria turn grabs in turn 6 and provides a topic change. She holds the floor, refusing "to be spoken for" (Bahri in Lazarus 2004: 204) as the whole extract is about her. She is actually protesting against the stereotypical description of her in turn 5 uttered by Father Villa. In turn 7 there is a topic shift again. S.C. initiates a topic dealing with reasons which could have led to Anna-Maria's action, accusing her of obsession and insanity.

The turn order shows an unequal distribution of turns. The turn pattern employed in turn 1-6 attempts an A-B-C-B-C-D or S.C.-Malibu-Villa-Malibu-Villa-Anna-Maria.

Although Anna-Maria is the focal point of their interaction, she is sidelined by the turn order. She has only one turn that she has gained through turn grabbing. Anna-Maria's waiting for her turn, however, "does not signify exclusion" (Herman: 1995: 114) because "the turn taking system in force...is a formal one based on order of precedence" (*Ibid.*). This is confirmed by Father Villa in Turn 5, "she does not seem to understand the gravity for her actions. She is innocent". Villa degrades Anna-Maria to an innocent little girl who has not fully developed mentally and who does not comprehend her actions. Cameron's observation that women become stereotyped as everything about them "is traced back to their sex alone" (Cameron 1988: 8) is exactly what Villa thinks of Anna-Maria.

Turn size and texture vary, but not drastically. In turn 1-6, Malibu's turns are longer in comparison to Villa's. He uses his turns to praise S.C. and to demonstrate his power in terms of social rank. Anna-Maria's turn which she uses to defend herself from the male stereotype as displayed by Father Villa is longer and reveals her conversational power. From turn 7-11, S.C.'s turns include many questions which expose the lawyers' frustrations about Anna-Maria's refusal "to be moulded into the male's perception of her selfhood" (Lombardozzi 2005: 222). Malibu's turns are short. He responds to S.C.'s questions but his answer in turn 8, "I don't understand, Prof", seems unsatisfactory to S.C. who reinitiates his question in turn 9. In the last two turns they eventually project their stereotypical assertion that Anna-Maria is obsessed and insane.

The topic management is another strategy that has been used effectively in the extract. The interactants manipulate the topic towards a common purpose. Malibu's turns, as mentioned earlier, focus on assuring Villa that S.C. will handle the case brilliantly and that he has confidence in him because of his vast experience. Father Villa wants the assurance that the lawyers will defend Anna-Maria. It is in turn 5 that he steers the talk away from the lawyers to Anna-Maria herself by doubting her state of mind. Even the lawyers stick to the same topic in turn 7-11. They do not want to believe that Anna-Maria intentionally killed the General. They fail to accept that she was really making a political statement,

avenging her mother's rape and brutal murder of her family for political reasons. There is nothing wrong with her, as Father Villa reveals later in the play when he avers, "I have heard the lawyers talk about Anna-Maria's state of mind. There is nothing wrong with her state of mind. She frolicked with little girls not because of immaturity on her part, but because like all saints she loved children (Mda 1996: 98). The lawyers however, prefer to demean her by accusing her of being insane and obsessed merely because her courage in avenging her family's murder is a trait associated with men. Docility and resignation are the only traits expected of her. What the lawyers say about her expresses a stereotype that reinforces men's position of strength and their subordination of women.

3.4.2. Violence against women

Bahri in Lazarus (2004: 206) comments that Florence Stratton once observed that "while women are excluded from the male domain of community power, men are permitted to intrude into their domestic domain. Moreover... the intrusion is often violent". In the play at hand Mda has not portrayed the female protagonist in a domestic setting, where her primary role is doing household or domestic chores. Anna-Maria is a professional woman. She is a teacher of Mathematics at a Catholic High School. She is also described as a very beautiful young woman. She is, however, still a victim of gender based violence, which began at a tender age when she experienced the sexual assault of her mother. The extract is a demonstration of one of the instances of violence against women as portrayed in the play:

(1) S.C.: *What happened that evening, Anna-Maria?*

(2) ANNA-MARIA: *I am tired. She says I must sit down and answer no more questions.*

(3) S.C.: *Who says?*

(4) ANNA-MARIA: *I cannot tell you. You won't understand.*

(5) S.C.: *Well, you cannot sit down. You are giving evidence. In a court of law. Under oath.*

(6) ANNA-MARIA: *I will sit down all the same. You can continue the trial without me.*

(She sits on the bench and softly plays her guitar)

(7) S.C.: *(exasperated): The evidence, Anna-Maria! The evidence!*

(8) VILLA: *Then they heard the omnibus sound of marching boots outside. And the crazy laughter of drunken soldiers.*

(9) S.C.: *But you cannot give evidence on her behalf, Father Villa.*

(10) VILLA: *The soldiers kicked the door open. They never knocked. They kicked the door open and walked into the room. No questions. Nothing. They lined the family against the wall. And ate the food in the house.*

(11) S.C.: *Please, Father Villa.*

(12) VILLA: *After the feast, the school teacher and the two little children were forced, at gun point, to watch as the soldiers took turns to rape the woman of the house. He tried to struggle to save his wife, but he was handcuffed, and thoroughly beaten. This agony lasted for ours, the man a powerless spectator, and the children screaming. At first the woman screamed too, but a few vicious blows on the jaw with the butt of the gun saw to it that she shut up...*

(Mda 1996: 87)

The two options used in the extract are current speaker selects next and self selecting. In turn 1-6 S.C. and Anna-Maria select each other by name, questions and the pronoun 'you'. S.C. selects Anna-Maria by name in turn 1; she takes the turn and shifts the focus and direction of the conversation away, from providing the court evidence, to herself. Turn 7-12 is based on self selection. Villa turn grabs in all his turns since S.C. had selected Anna-Maria. He acts on behalf of Anna-Maria who is holding back the evidence needed by S.C. in all his turns. Generally, Anna-Maria's turns reveal her courage and determination to defy her oppressors while Villa uses his turns to expose the intensity of violence against women.

Turn order reveals the equal distribution of turns. Turn 1-6 have S.C.-Anna-Maria-S.C.-Anna-Maria-S.C.-Anna-Maria in interaction. The pattern then changes from turn 7-12 to S.C-Villa-S.C-Villa-S.C.-Villa. Villa's turns are all based on the

evidence needed by the court as to what happened on the night Anna-Maria's family was murdered.

Turn size and texture vary. S.C.'s turns are shorter. In his interaction with Anna-Maria, his turns are full of questions as he attempts to force her to provide the evidence. Anna-Maria's turns are also short and she uses them to hold back the evidence needed by S.C. It is only Villa who turn grabs and extends his speaking rights. His turns are longer than all the other interactants. The turn length as a floor management strategy is the most effective in revealing the subordination of women perpetuated by violence against them. This strategy allows Villa to "dramatize moments of sustained emotional release" (Herman 1995: 119). His lengthy speech enables him to relate the painful experience of Anna-Maria, thus exposing the political system that allowed women to be relegated to "object status" (Lakoff 1975: 27) whose primary role is to satisfy men's sexual desires.

Another strategy used in the extract which demonstrates women's subordinate status is the sequencing strategy. Turn 1-6 consists of embedded sequences that prolong the interaction between S.C. and Anna-Maria. The embeddings display the path taken by S.C. and Anna-Maria's interaction. It is clear that they have diverted from the main emphasis on giving the evidence. However, the intervening turns or embeddings have to be relevant to the main talk initiated by S.C. in turn 1 until the second part of the pair is performed (Herman 1995). In their exchange, the intervening parts do belong to the same topic since Anna-Maria's refusals to provide evidence are based on her tiredness and the reason that someone says she must sit down and answer no more questions. What is different is that the second part of the pair is not performed. Anna-Maria withholds the information needed by S.C. as she eventually "sits on the bench and softly plays her guitar" (Mda1996: 87). According to Herman (1995: 98) "silences occur at points where information to be given can be explosive". They may also "presuppose...emotional activity" (*Ibid.*:99). It is, therefore, evident that Anna-Maria finds it hard to reveal her agonizing experience. The unsympathetic lawyer, nevertheless does not care about her emotional space. He fails to empathize with her. Instead, he loses his

temper and shouts at her in turn 7, “*the evidence, Anna-Maria! The evidence!*” When Villa turn grabs to speak on her behalf, the lawyer insists that he is not the appropriate speaker. This verbal and emotional abuse that Anna-Maria faces in the hands of the lawyer as portrayed by the sequencing strategy reveals the subordinate position women often occupy in our societies.

3.4.3. Women as objects to be looked at

Mulvey in Aston (1995: 42) writes about women objectification in the following terms:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.

An almost similar assertion to the above has also been made by Lakoff (1975: 27) who contends, “if women are there for the use and enjoyment of men, they are not fully human beings in their own right”. An extract demonstrating the loss of identity of women through objectification follows:

(1) ANNA-MARIA: *You must be joking, of course. Everybody believes in the existence of God.*

(2) PAMPIRI: *I’m serious.*

(3) ANNA-MARIA: *Then how come you teach here, in a Catholic school?*

(4) PAMPIRI: *This is a good school, and I’m a good teacher. So I teach here I don’t teach religion.*

(5) ANNA-MARIA: *(obviously she finds this intriguing): Does Sister Mary-Ellen know? I am sure she does not. Don’t worry, I won’t tell on you.*

(6) PAMPIRI *(amused): She knows very well. We talk about it sometimes. She is very broadminded, you know. She herself is a socialist, and believes*

in liberation theology. Got converted into liberation theology when she worked in Nicaragua.

(7) ANNA-MARIA: *I wouldn't keep you here if I were principal.*

(8) PAMPIRI: *That's what Father Villa thinks. You have met Father Villa who is in charge of Our Lady of Fatima Cathedral. He thinks I should have been long kicked out of this school. After thorough flogging, of course. Although Mary-Ellen is appalled at my beliefs, she firmly believes that as a progressive within the Catholic Church she shouldn't concern herself with the religious beliefs of her staff, as long as they don't spread such beliefs to the students.*

(9) ANNA-MARIA: *My God! I have never heard anything of the sort. You seem so sensible, yet you say such stupid things.*

(10) PAMPIRI: *You seem like a sensible girl yourself. And beautiful. How come you are a nun?*

(11) ANNA-MARIA: *(rather flattered): Beautiful sensible girls become nuns.*

(12) PAMPIRI: *That's a wasted beauty. May be you should marry me, and we shall live happily ever after.*

(13) ANNA-MARIA: *I am married to Jesus.*

(14) PAMPIRI: *(laughs): And your mother-in-law is Mary, who happens to be a virgin.*

(15) ANNA-MARIA *(not offended at all): You think it's funny, don't you?*

(Mda 1996: 95-96)

In the extract, turn change is achieved by current speaker selecting next, and throughout the extract the characters select each other by the pronoun 'you' and by directing a question. Turns 1-9 show Anna-Maria as the dominant partner because in these turns she is the one doing the selection. In turns 10-15, though, Pampiri alters the focus and direction of talk and becomes the one selecting next speaker. The turn change is achieved smoothly. Even In turns 10-15 both characters show equal power relations in handling the conflict.

Turn order reveals equal distribution of turns among the characters. The interaction takes the A-B-A-B... pattern. In the first nine turns, it is Pampiri's affairs that are talked about, afterwards, in turns 10-15, Pampiri shifts the topic away from him to Anna-Maria who displays her ability to confront Pampiri and to speak her mind.

Turn size and texture vary. In the first nine turns, Anna-Maria's turns are short and include many questions as she enquires about Pampiri's religion and his stay in a Catholic school. Pampiri's turns are occasionally longer and he uses them to respond to Anna-Maria's questions. From turn 10-15 Pampiri's turn lengths vary from simple to compound sentences. Anna-Maria's turns are shorter compared to those of Pampiri. Pampiri shifts the topic from his affairs and expresses his sexual interest in Anna-Maria. She rejects him, by clearly stating her purity and innocence, "I am married to Jesus". Pampiri then uses his turn 14 to mock Anna-Maria, "and your mother in law is Mary, who happens to be a virgin". Even though she is not offended, Anna-Maria's last turn shows that she will not give in to Pampiri's sexual advances.

The sequencing strategy has played a huge role in the structuring of the course of action. In turn 1-9, for example, the interaction is based on Comment-Comment and Question-Answer sequences in adjacency pairing. The sequences establish Anna-Maria as the dominant partner because she is the one initiating exchanges. She is able "to determine the scope" (Herman 1995: 134) of Pampiri's "turns in her role of initiator of discourse" (*Ibid.*). All her comments and questions require him to provide information about how he manages to teach in a Catholic school as an atheist. Pampiri answers all the questions to her satisfaction; what reinforces Anna-Maria's dominance is the fact that Pampiri is "cast in the role of respondent" (*Ibid.*). She controls the topic. However, turns 10-15 indicate that the tables are turned. The topic strategy has proven Herman's observation to be true that occupying the same social position as men does not advantage women when interacting with them. Privileged women, like Anna-Maria, who are beautiful and educated, still find themselves encountering a similar issue with privileged men. The topic handled in turn 10-15 awards Pampiri dominance, firstly, because the

topic control is generally in his hands. He directs the talk while Anna-Maria is the respondent. Secondly, the topic reduces Anna-Maria to an “object of desire for male consumption” (Aston 1995: 43). Anna-Maria does her best to stop Pampiri’s sexual advances but he pursues the topic. He introduces his topic on lust by saying: “you seem like a sensible girl yourself. And beautiful. How come you are a nun?” Anna-Maria is being referred to as a girl; this stresses “the idea of immaturity” (Lakoff 1975: 25). Pampiri describes this particular girl as sensible which implies that unlike other girls, Anna-Maria is mature. She is also beautiful. The adjectives, ‘sensible’ and ‘beautiful’ which Pampiri uses clearly indicate that Anna-Maria represents women who are looked at by men and seen as “the object of the male gaze” (Birch 1991: 132); hence the “language appropriate to that gaze is used” (*Ibid.*). The words are meant to lure Anna-Maria into a sexual relationship with Pampiri. The language used is “oppressive because it signals a patriarchal order which positions women as powerless” (*Ibid.*). Pampiri is, moreover, querying what induced her to be a nun. The implication is that he does not expect her to live a life of celibacy, beautiful as she is. In turn 12 he says, “*that’s wasted beauty*”, which implies that by not living a heterosexual life, Anna-Maria’s beauty is going to waste. It is not put to good or full use. He suggests that she should marry him, signifying that he is the one who will be able to make good use of her. What is offensive here is the “implicit assumption that the woman is responsible for the man’s sexual functioning activities” (*Ibid.*: 133). When Anna-Maria tries to challenge him in turn 13, “I’m married to Jesus”, he mocks her. By so doing, he is actually emphasizing that she cannot escape the patriarchal order of female objectification.

In the above sections the emphasis has been on male dominance and subordination of women as portrayed by the dramatic discourse. It is however, the intention of the study also to show that though the dramatic discourse reveals a female protagonist who has suffered marginalization in a male dominated society, Mda has empowered her to confront and subvert the structures which reinforce gender-based inequality. To this the analysis now turns.

3.5. Women's empowerment

3.5.1. Character portrayal

According to Bennison in Culpeper et al (2002), the very same frameworks used in discourse analysis can also be used to analyze the conversational behaviours of characters and to draw conclusions about their character. In the cast list, we are, however, provided with brief but very significant descriptions of Anna-Maria, whose character analysis is important in this section. Mda has cast her as an extremely beautiful twenty nine year old nun, who teaches Mathematics at a Catholic school. This description alone challenges the status quo. Unlike the traditional portrayal of women in domestic settings where they “are given identities...by virtue of their relationships with men” (Lakoff 1975: 35), Mda has placed Anna-Maria in a social position not consistent with the “underclass status” (Lombardozi 2005: 216) inscribed on women by patriarchal societies. She is a teacher by profession and, moreover beautiful. Her character portrayal as a nun also means that she does not need a man to have an identity, an act that subverts male hegemony and patriarchal order. The extract shows how Mda has empowered his female character:

(1) S.C. (to Malibu): I see you are still bent on your obsession defence.

(2) MALIBU: Obsession is a form of insanity. So we both agree on the insanity plea.

(3) S.C.: But you have a different approach to it.

(4) MALIBU: My argument is that Anna-Maria's emotional growth stopped at the age of nine when she saw her mother raped and her family killed. Would you not agree with me on that, Anna-Maria? I think it is a good defence.

Anna-Maria laughs at him

(5) ANNA-MARIA: *In other words I am a nine year old moron in a twenty nine year old body. I think it is a stupid defence, if you ask me.*

(6) MALIBU: *Nobody is asking you in any case. You are in no position to know the difference.*

(7) ANNA-MARIA: *That's what some smart-arsed lawyer would think.*

(8) PAMPIRI: *Anna-Maria!*

(9) ANNA-MARIA *(giggles): That's the kind of language learnt from you, Lawrence.*

(10) S.C.: *Obviously the prosecution disagrees with your defence. She was able to relate to people as an adult. She went through high school and through university, and is now a good teacher of mathematics.*

(11) MALIBU: *My Lord I object to that.*

(12) S.C.: *Your objection is over-ruled.*

(13) MALIBU: *The prosecution is twisting my words for its own purposes. I am not talking of Anna-Maria's intellectual growth. I am talking of her emotional growth.*

(14) ANNA-MARIA: *I should know my emotional growth better than any of you here.*

(15) S.C.: *Proceed, counsellor for the defence.*

(16) MALIBU: *Thank you, my Lord. It is at that time that she planned vengeance.*

(17) S.C.: *What time do you mean?*

(18) MALIBU: *When she was nine. When her family was raped and killed.*

(19) ANNA-MARIA: *I have never heard such rubbish in my life; have you Lawrence?*

(20) PAMPIRI: *They are trying to save you, Anna-Maria.*

(21) ANNA-MARIA: *They need to save themselves first, before they can be in a position to save anybody else.*

(Mda 1996: 115-116)

The most effective strategies that are involved in the portrayal of Anna-Maria's character in the extract are the length of turns, a floor management strategy, and turn change options.

The characters' utterances in the extract vary, but not hugely. S.C.s turns, for example, are short because he uses them to prompt Malibu about the defence. Malibu, on the other hand, has longer turns compared to S.C.s turns because he uses them to convince him that the defence which reduces Anna-Maria to a nine year old child who is without emotions, is the best. Pampiri's turns are short. They vary from one word to sentence level, and both of them are directives to Anna-Maria on how to behave in a court of law. Anna-Maria's turns are short and explicit. She uses them to defy her oppressors who want to prove her 'otherness'. In all her turns she consistently confronts the male characters, using "stronger and forceful statements" (Lakoff in Thorne and Henley 1975: 25), revealing the character traits with which Mda has empowered her and which "reinforce men's position of strength in the real world" (*Ibid.*) since they have always been associated with men.

The turn taking patterns are constructed along two options, that is, current speaker selects next and next speaker self selects or turn grabs. The first four turns constitute a conversation between S.C. and Malibu where they select each other by pronoun. The focus of the dialogue is on Anna-Maria's defence which Malibu clarifies in his fourth turn. In this turn he selects Anna-Maria by directing a question to her, demanding her approval of the defence. Anna-Maria takes the turn and laughs at Malibu before speaking, showing that she disapproves the defence that reduces her to a nine year old child. She confidently says "*I am a nine year old moron in a twenty nine year old body*". She is defiant. She openly refuses to be denigrated to a nine year old girl who cannot feel emotions. She is bold enough to tell Malibu how demeaning the defence is, saying "*I think it is a stupid defence*". Her assertiveness is contrary to Lakoff's claim that women avoid "stating an opinion directly" (Lakoff cited by Kramer in Thorne and Henley 1975: 48).

The interchange between Anna-Maria and Malibu continues up to turn 7. In turn 6, Malibu's response to Anna-Maria who had selected her by pronoun in turn 6 is

equally degrading as he resorts to the patriarchal tactic of silencing women when he says “nobody is asking you in any case. You are in no position to know the difference”. The turn also reveals that Malibu even doubts Anna-Maria’s intellectual capability. However, in her next turn, Anna-Maria remains confrontational. She has no fear of her oppressor and even uses the expletive “...smart arsed lawyer” to show her militancy. Mda has placed her in a position of power to overrule “the notion that women should be ‘nice’ and ‘ladies’, they should carefully monitor their behavior” (Thorne and Henley 1975: 18) because it “functions as a strong mechanism of social control” (*Ibid.*). In turn 8, Pampiri introduces himself to the interaction, uninvited. His turn grab is self orientated. He gives Anna-Maria unsolicited advice in an imperative tone after her use of the expletive in the previous turn. He is, in reality patronizing her. His reaction implies that Anna-Maria is a minor who cannot think for herself. However, Anna-Maria is unapologetic about her behaviour. She is not prepared to accept the inferior position ascribed to her.

Turn 10 is also a turn grab by S.C. who addresses Malibu; they interact briefly, focusing on their initial topic, Anna-Maria’s emotional growth. In turn 14, Anna-Maria turn grabs again saying, “*I should know my emotional growth better than anyone of you here*”. She is firm and forceful in rejecting subordination, even though in this turn she is not listened to or given any interactional equality. Instead, in turn 15, S.C. turn grabs and demands that Malibu proceeds with the defence. After their brief exchange, in turn 19, Anna-Maria turn grabs again, bringing in the topic she wants addressed, with the hope of gaining support from Pampiri whom she selects as next speaker by name. Pampiri in his turn continues to give her his advice saying, “*they are trying to save you*”, which reinforces the authority of males over women. However, the strong willed Anna-Maria who “won’t budge” (Mda 1996: 109) tells her oppressors in her last turn “...to save themselves first, before they can be in a position to save anybody else”.

3.5.2. Voice

It is almost impossible to discuss the concept of ‘voice’ without understanding how the ‘human subject’ is constructed (see section 2.5.1)). Aston (1995) argues that

the Lacanian model has shed some light on how the position of the female subject is constructed. She points out that “in the Lacanian model the position of the female subject is...one of double alienation” (Aston 1995: 37) and cites Case (1989) who explains that:

If I might expand Lacan’s metaphor in order to include the possibility of the female subject, ‘she’ also sees in that mirror that she is a woman. At that moment she further fractures, split once as the male-identified and his subjectivity and split once more as the woman who observes her own subject position as both male-identified and female.

(*Ibid.*)

Aston explains how Case’s observation suggests that unlike the male, the female subject cannot be considered as a single whole subject in her own right because she is aware that the male’s discourse is not hers. She is defined in relation to the male. In short, the female subject is silenced. In the article entitled “Feminist theories of representation”, in Aston (1995), it has been clarified that if women are silenced they are unable “to take up a subject- position in discourse, to identify with the ‘I’ of utterance” (*Ibid.*:37). The women are expected to be passive listeners and submit to the authority of the men. The women are essentially muted. In this study though, Mda, in an attempt to empower women, has given his female protagonist the voice to contest male power with its violent manifestations. For example, in scene 2 of the play, it is shown that Anna-Maria refuses to be silenced. She finds it impossible to accept the male perception of her: that “she does not seem to understand the gravity of her actions. She is innocent” (Mda 1995: 85). The stage directions indicate she “suddenly stands up, and for the first time she is angry...”(*Ibid.*). She is shocked and signals that she does not want to be “spoken for” (Bahri in Lazarus 2004: 204). She wants to be heard and therefore, grabs the turn, “no, I am not innocent...”(Mda 1995: 85). Similarly, in scene 3 when her oppressors “prescribe her feelings for her” (Lombardozzi 2005: 221) saying, “no, you want to be happy, Anna-Maria, but you cannot be happy, circumstances do not allow you to be happy” (*Ibid.*: 86), she also refuses to be muted and firmly says,

“they have decreed that I should not be happy, but I decided to defy that. I am happy your Lordship. No argument in the world will convince me that I am not”.
(*Ibid.*).

The extract below offers a demonstration of how the dramatic discourse exposes the concept of voice:

(1) S.C.: *That Sunday morning you saw him in church.*

(2) ANNA-MARIA: *Yes, your Lordship.*

(3) S.C.: *And you knew it was him?*

(4) ANNA-MARIA: *Yes, your Lordship.*

(5) S.C.: *How did you positively identify him?*

(6) MALIBU: *Does it matter really?*

(7) S.C.: *It does, A.C. What if this was a wrong person?*

(8) MALIBU: *Our defence still stands. The main thing is that she believed he was the right person.*

(9) S.C.: *Then we must establish beyond any reasonable doubt that she believed he was the right person.*

(10) ANNA-MARIA: *I know he was the man. I have no doubt about that. He had grown a little bit fat, and more grey. He was much more fat than he used to be.*

(11) S.C.: *Understandably so.*

(12) ANNA-MARIA: *But it was him alright. He was wearing an army uniform, very much like yours, which had many medals on it. (she laughs) They seemed to be weighing very heavily on him, and he wearily walked towards the altar.*

(13) MALIBU: *Did you, at that moment, make the decision?*

(14) ANNA-MARIA: *The medals rattled as he solemnly marched towards the altar, and everyone's attention was on him. He was an august figure, very impressive. (laughs) You know, he was a general. He was in the ruling Military Council. (Laughs) I never knew that. I never took any notice who was or was not in the Military Council.....*

(15) MALIBU: *Did you at that moment make the decision?*

(16) ANNA-MARIA: *He knelt before the altar, and like the young of a bird opened his mouth to receive the holy communion from Father Villa.*

(Mda 1996: 105-106)

In the extract above, the most effective strategy that is involved in showing Anna-Maria's speaking voice is the floor management strategy. The turn taking patterns are constructed in line with two options, that is, current speaker selects next and next speaker self selects. In turn 1-5 S.C. and Anna-Maria select each other by pronoun. In turn 6 Malibu turn grabs and interact briefly with S.C. up to turn 10. Selection is carried out by directing questions to each other or by comment. Anna-Maria turn grabs in turn 10 with the intention of repairing S.C.'s turn. In turn 11 S.C. makes a follow up comment to her repair but she responds by giving a description of the General in turn 12. Malibu inserts himself into the interaction in turn 13, on a change of topic, when he questions Anna-Maria about whether she had made a decision to kill the general on that Sunday morning she saw him in church. He fails to attract any interpersonal support as Anna-Maria continues with her description of the general. Malibu, in turn 15, tries in vain to direct the same question to Anna-Maria who in the next turn still continues with her speech. The turn order reveals equal distribution of turns among the participants.

While the equal number of turns suggests that the power between participants is similarly equal, an examination of the texture and lengths of turns reveals an asymmetry. The turn size and texture vary. In turn 1-5, S.C.'s turns are short. He uses them to cross examine Anna-Maria. In turn 6-9 he is providing responses to Malibu's questions about the importance of Anna-Maria's identification of the General. Malibu's turns are also short and are mostly questions. In his first two turns he enquires about the general's identification while in turn 13-16 he questions Anna-Maria about when she made a decision to kill the general. Anna-Maria's turn lengths vary from short sentences to long speeches. In the first four turns she answers S.C.'s questions in short sentences, but it is in turns 12-16 where she extends her floor rights. Her longer turns prove her to be the dominant speaker.

She blocks other speakers' access to the floor and violates the turn taking system by not providing the second part of the Question-Answer adjacency pair. Malibu, for example, endeavours to access the floor by reinitiating his question, which Anna-Maria ignores, continuing with her speech. According to Herman (1995: 255), "gendered deafness" is common "in mixed party talk" (*Ibid.*). Usually it is women who speak without being "given a hearing since various strategies are used to silence them, inattentiveness to the speech, or non-listening, being one of them" (*Ibid.*). However, in the extract Mda subverts male hegemony and gives Anna-Maria a voice, speaking from a position of power. She confidently displays her determination to exact vengeance by refusing to be relegated to a mentally inferior person by the lawyers who say in turn 9 they "...must establish beyond any reasonable doubt that she believed he was the right person". This suggests that they plead temporary insanity by stating that she mistakenly believed that she killed the right person. Anna-Maria does not want to be misrepresented. In turn 10, she asserts, "I know he was the man. I have no doubt about that..." and in all her other turns she gives a vivid description of the General. In doing so, she hogs the floor using very long turns, a tool used by "men to appropriate control" (*Ibid.*). Mda, in other words, has used the floor, "in terms of ...turn length..." (*Ibid.*: 256) to unmute Anna-Maria. Her long turns mean that "the burden of being the target of speech and the role of listener" (*Ibid.*) in the extract, is placed heavily on the lawyers. Anna-Maria is being listened to. She successfully challenges the patriarchal order that has largely marginalized female voices.

3.6. Conclusion

The options for exploitation offered by the turn taking system which include turn change, turn order and distribution, turn length, turn sequences and topic control have been shown to be appropriate resources for the analysis of gender issues in *The Nun's Romantic Story*. The analysis has demonstrated the important contribution that these frameworks of analysis make to the understanding of gender. They have been a useful guide in revealing the male strategies of appropriating control which include initiating and controlling topics, exclusion, and

hogging the floor by taking long turns. Similarly, the frameworks have been successfully used to reveal the demeaning positions occupied by women in our societies and how Mda has attempted to empower them through his female character in the play. The analysis has reversed the male perception that women are weak, harmless and incapable of defending themselves.

CHAPTER FOUR: *AND THE GIRLS IN THEIR SUNDAY DRESSES*

4.1. Introduction

In *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* two women, dedicate themselves to changing the socio-economic and political status of their societies. By closely examining the dramatic dialogue between the Lady and the Woman I hope to provide a clear understanding of gender issues in the play. The analysis of this play focuses more on the major themes as they are the ones that expose gender relations. The chapter begins with a summary of the play (section 4.2.) together with an overview of reviews and previous analyses of the play. A discussion of the theme of betrayal follows (see 4.3- 4.3.2.). The theme of poverty is dealt with in section 4.4 while the theme of prostitution is dealt with at length (see section 4.5) where issues of the Lady's obsession with appearance and denigration of men are discussed. Section 4.6 investigates the theme of corruption. In all sections the different frameworks of analysis are used in exposing the changing positions of women in postcolonial African societies.

4.2. And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses

The play is set in postcolonial Lesotho and was first produced in 1988. Devant in Mda (2004: xxvi) asserts that it was "originally performed at the 1988 Edinburgh Fringe Festival" and was "the first play representing Lesotho to be performed abroad" (*Ibid.*). It is a story of two women, the Woman and the Lady. The latter is a sex worker from a wealthy home. She dropped out of university to marry an Italian chef who eventually deserts her to run off with their housemaid. She has been a successful courtesan but as she grows older she loses business as the 'Johns' prefer young girls. The Woman is of the same age as the Lady. She is, however, described in scene 1 as the less attractive and as looking "like someone's mother" (Mda 1993:4). She has been the housemaid of an Italian chef who fell in love with her, this is probably the same man the Lady married. The Italian chef initiated affairs with different women and abandoned the Woman who eventually

acquires her own room in Cape Town, continues doing domestic work and becomes involved in civil rights and trade union movements.

In the play, the women are waiting in a queue to buy foreign aid rice at a Lesotho government depot. The rice has been donated by a foreign country, Italy, as the Lady reveals, "*Italy. You see the writing on those bags? It's in Italian [sic] (Ibid.: 15).*" The rice is then sold in bulk to businesses such as "wholesalers, general dealers and jobbers" (*Ibid.: 14*), to be retailed in the shops at inflated prices; what is left is then sold to the public. The two women depend upon each other. They share 'the chair of patience' brought by the Lady as well as the small amount of food bought by the Woman at a local store. At the end of the play the women have to fill out complicated forms that require irrelevant details and eventually decide to go without buying the food meant to degrade them. Selling the donated rice to the poor is similar to stealing from them. It impoverishes them even further. Besides keeping them "where they are, poor" (Duggan in Bell and Jacobs 2009: 51), it reinforces dependency (Steel 2007), making it almost impossible for them to stand up and improve their condition.

In her analysis of the play, Duggan (2009: 50) argues that "Mda takes a detailed look at the corruption of the petty bureaucracy of the civil service and the misappropriation of what rightfully belongs to the ordinary people". She regards the play as a representation of neocolonialism where "ordinary people are no better off than they were before" (*Ibid.*) because the "new ruling elite...steal from the poor". Mda himself in *Sometimes there is a Void* confirms that *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* is "about corruption in the food aid programmes" (Mda 2011: 333). Through corruption "the aid aimed at the destitute is being resold for another's gain" (Steel 1999: 122), and in this case it is the new ruling elite that benefits from the sales.

Duggan also observes that in the play Mda tackles the theme of poverty. He "sees clearly the desperation of the poor who can only act according to need not reason" (Duggan in Bell and Jacobs 2009: 51). She explains that poverty compels people "to wait in a queue for four days" (*Ibid.*) to purchase food "that was donated and

meant to be free" (*Ibid.*). This situation, according to Steel, leaves the people "in double jeopardy" (Steel 2009: 122) as "the aid structures reinforce dependency, and leaders through their nefarious dealings, become enemies, 'care-less' of the public in their care, uncaring that the poorest of the poor may not survive" (*Ibid.*). Duggan moves on to link the theme of poverty to the theme of prostitution. She declares, "prostitution is an issue of poverty" (Duggan in Bell and Jacobs 2009: 52) and asserts that the Lady, who is such a sex worker and who is being described as "attempting to make herself appear 'chic and sexy'" (*Ibid.*) at the beginning of the play, is actually destitute. This is revealed by the Lady herself who "has to share her chair with the Woman in exchange for food" (*Ibid.*).

For Mazibuko (2007), *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* is a play where Mda explores not only poverty and prostitution, but also betrayal, as another key theme. She interprets the betrayal of the Woman and the Lady by the same Italian man as exposing "the ways in which women suffer at the hands of men (*Ibid.*: 20). The infidelities of the Italian "points [*sic*] men as unreliable and out to exploit and demean women" (*Ibid.*: 12). Duggan, however, tackles the theme of betrayal at the political level. She contends that "the two women represent victims of oppression in Lesotho..." (Duggan 2009: 50). The oppressors or colonial leaders she describes as "white faces [which] have merely been replaced with black ones" (*Ibid.*) because even after colonization the people have not yet attained "similar rights and quality of life, they cannot be termed liberated" (*Ibid.*: 51). Political betrayal has been demonstrated by the civil servants who are "obviously economically better off, as symbolized by their regular, well paid jobs and attractive clothing, the beautiful Sunday Dresses..." (*Ibid.*: 50), while ordinary people are drowning in poverty.

Although Duggan compliments Mda for examining gender "for the first time,...specifically femaleness and the familiar themes of prostitution, poverty and betrayal" (*Ibid.*) which she says are "viewed from the female point of view" (*Ibid.*), Peterson, is not satisfied with Mda's explanation of gender. He is not convinced by Mda's representation of gender issues and claims that his work presents women

as an alienated social group. Peterson in Mda (1993: xxi) points out that Mda's "shortcoming is a common one in African performance where women, increasingly, are cast as protagonists who are broadly representative of a diverse range of marginalized and exploited social groups". Mazibuko (2007: 12) confirms this viewpoint when she observes, "Woman and Lady's oppression is gendered. As women, they are primarily responsible for domestic duties which include ensuring that their families are fed".

Even though Mazibuko concurs with Peterson that Mda has not done justice to gender issues, she does regard the play as a celebration of "an alliance between the two women, the Lady and the Woman, who decide they will no longer compromise their dignity by waiting for days in the rice queue" (Mazibuko 2007: 10). She further argues that the women's union is actually an escape from "their condition of entrapment" (*Ibid.*: 12). They come together "against the neocolonial system that abuses them as well as against the man who preyed on them" (*Ibid.*).

As the critics above have done, the play will be examined in terms of its themes. My approach, however, is slightly different because it involves undertaking a close analysis of dramatic dialogue which will not only investigate the themes, but also reveal the positions of women in society. Since the play begins with the Woman and the Lady in a queue to buy donated rice meant to be free, laying bare the socio-economic and political status of Lesotho, where the play is set, it is fitting to begin with a discussion of the theme of betrayal.

4.3. The theme of betrayal

4.3.1. The theme of postcolonial political betrayal

Postcolonial political betrayal is a concept that is well described by Mike van Graan in Uwah Chijioke (2015: 135) when he comments:

For many post-colonial Africans,...the kingdom which they at one stage thought was nigh, is not among them, has still not come and may indeed be further away. But for some it has come. Either new elites have emerged or

old elites have continued to enjoy their privileges, but now with greater legitimacy as the tyranny under which they acquired their privileges has been cast on the scrap heap of history and the cocktail party and caviar boundaries have been redrawn to accommodate a few former victims.

In short, van Graan argues that most post-colonial countries or third world countries are no better off now since betrayal or “broken promises seem to be the rule rather than the exception in all these countries” (*Ibid.*:135-136). *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* is a play set in a third world country demonstrating the “large scale betrayal” (Steel 2009: 122) exhibited by the corrupt and exploitative government officials. The two female protagonists, the Woman and the Lady, experience this exploitation and affirm the accuracy of Peterson’s comment that:

History and feminists have demonstrated persuasively that democratization of political institutions, whatever the real gains it has for women as a social group, is more likely to lead to the reconfiguration of gender subordination than its eradication.

(Peterson in Mda 1993: xxii)

Below is an extract indicating how postcolonial political betrayal perpetuates women’s subordination:

The Lady stands up, and they both wave at the throngs of people who are passing by.

(1) WOMAN: *Goodbye, marena-a-rona!*

(2) LADY: *Have a beautiful lunch.*

(3) WOMAN: *As you chew think of us who are sitting here in the hot sun and in the rain!*

(4) LADY *[to The Woman]: Why did you say that? Are you protesting or what? Do you want them to keep us here much longer than we have been? [To the throngs] She didn’t mean it bo-ntate le bo-‘me’. What she was trying to say is...*

(5) WOMAN: *Who told you to speak on my behalf? I know exactly what I am trying to say. [To the throngs] What I am trying to say is, for how long do you think we are going to wait here?*

(6) LADY: *You see they are laughing at us. You want to make us a laughing stock of the store men and office girl*

(Mda 1993:6-7)

In the above extract, the turn change option proves to be the most effective in exposing the theme of postcolonial political betrayal. It occurs by current speaker selecting next and next speaker self selecting. On the whole, the two characters, the Woman and the Lady, conduct their interactions via a smooth turn change. They listen to each other fully and “exchange offences in equal measure” (Herman in Culpeper et al 1998:30). However, as Herman asserts, smooth turn change does not always produce mutual understanding amongst interactants: the Woman and the Lady’s turns reveal the betrayal of the people by the political leaders who make them buy what rightfully belongs to them and their different attitudes towards this exploitation. In turn1-3 the Woman and the Lady are not talking to each other. As they wave good bye to the office girls, they self select and their utterances are directed to the latter. Through their exaggerated politeness in the first three turns, they reveal their state of desperation, powerlessness and the extent to which the system abuses them. In spite of the fact that they have been waiting for days in the queue to buy donated rice, the Lady in turn 2 still has the courage to say “have a beautiful lunch” to the office girls. The women have been denigrated by the system to a level where they realize that becoming angry will not produce any positive results. The only thing they are able to do is to kowtow to the government officials that “don’t have any regard” (Mda 1993: 16) for them.

The Woman’s turn 3 provides a topic change as she expresses a different form of subordination of women under the new democracy. She remarks, “as you chew think of us who are sitting here in the hot sun and in the rain”. She is seeking attention from the office girls, trying to highlight the fact that they have been dehumanized as they “sleep out of doors in all weathers...just to get one bag of

rice cheaply” (Duggan 1997: 80). The Woman is actually lodging a protest in a sarcastic manner against the system that has driven them to the margins of society.

The Lady’s turn 4 also occurs by self selection as the previous utterance made by the Woman was not directed to her. In this turn the Lady is cut short by the Woman who encroaches on her conversational space through interruption. According to Herman (1995: 107) “such conflicts over the right to speak may...involve opposing forces and points of view about dramatically significant matters”. This is pertinent because the Lady in turn 4 attempts to bring the Woman in line since she fails to realize the value of her utterance in turn 2. In turn 5, on the other hand, the Woman tells the Lady that she knows exactly what she is trying to say. She knows that she is conveying a political statement to the office girls. Even though the Lady seems to have accepted the exploitation, the Woman in her turn shows a sense of political betrayal which prompts her to ask the important question, “for how long do you think we’ll wait here”. This turn which the Woman obtains through the interruption strategy and which is “among the more dispreferred forms of turn change, given the one-speaker-speaks-at-a-time rule” (Herman 1995: 111) has been used by Mda to empower his female character “with the freedom to confront and articulate” (Lombardozi 2005: 215) her “emotions and perceptions” (*Ibid.*). He has given her the voice to speak for all the women like the Lady who are “ensnared in a culture of silence” (Mda in Cloete and Madadzhe 2007:39). In short, the Woman uses her turn to fearlessly express concern about how long it will take for them to wait for a better life.

In turn 6, the Lady does not provide the second part of the adjacency pair which constitutes an answer to the Woman’s question in turn 5. However, the failure to provide an ‘appropriate’ answer or to offer “interactional support” (Herman 1995: 256) through the expansion of the topic raised by the Woman is a strategy that allows her to expose the political system’s lack of concern about the welfare of the people. When the Lady says “you see they are laughing at us”, this indicates the extent of the lack of respect with which women have to put up in our societies. It is

women who become victims of oppression; this view point is supported by Mazibuko (2007) who argues that the Woman and the Lady are disadvantaged because of their gender. She asserts that generally women are the ones who have the responsibility of taking care of their families and they see to it that they are fed. Besides this oppression which is culturally rooted, the system exposes these women to the civil servants who laugh at their situation, which further “emphasize[s] the abjectness” (Duggan 1997:80) of their positions in society.

The theme of betrayal in the play is not only discussed in political terms, it is also expressed in sexual terms, in the discussion below.

4.3.2. Betrayal of women in sexual terms

In the play both women have been betrayed by the Italian chef who deserted both of them and also left them both destitute. To accentuate the betrayal of women by men, Mda has depicted “the notion of sexuality as...something depraved” (Duggan in Bell and Jacobs 2009: 49), evident in the fact that “both women have lost faith in the possibility of any meaningful relationship with men (Peterson in Mda 1993: xix). Their relationship with the Italian chef causes them to generalize their experience: “men...they are the same. They are like children of one person” (Mda 1993: 37). They indeed suggest that all men are wicked, while the Lady through her description of her “sexual encounters” (Duggan in Bell and Jacobs 2009: 49) in “negative terms” (*Ibid.*) confirms this. The extract below indicates that this ‘abnormality’ in sexual relationships is a result of the patriarchal order that allows women to be treated as sexual objects.

(1) LADY: *[desperately] Am I old, sister woman? Am I ugly?*

(2) WOMAN: *[reassuringly] Not at all. It's just that men are fickle. That's the whole problem.*

(3) LADY: *Yes, the bastards are unreliable. They find you where you are nice and fresh and young. They use you in many different ways, and then throw you away like the marrow of a horse when they have drained you of all flesh and blood. I hate the bastards. I was young once, sister woman. I*

was young and beautiful. I was the campus queen. That's when the father of my daughter met me. He lavished all his love and money on me. I always had booze and cigarettes for myself and my friends. I even left varsity for him. I gave birth to his daughter. Then the bastard left me. I heard he got a job as chef on some luxury liner.

(4) WOMAN: *Maybe that's because he was a foreigner. You should have got yourself a local man and settled down.*

(5) LADY: *Local men? They are bastards as well. Maybe even worse. They take you for granted. They don't treat you like a lady. They treat you like scum and you got to be at their back and call. Do everything for them. Even have to wipe their arses. No, sister woman. Men are all the same. That is why I got into this profession. I have been used. So I use them. The men I sleep with, in them I see the Italian chef. All of them are representative of him. That is why I am going to lay them to death, and take their money to boot. I hate the bastards, sister woman.*

(6) WOMAN: *Yet you make love to them.*

(7) LADY: *Those are johns. They are not human beings. Even as they undress I look at them and I feel like spitting all over their shrivelled bodies. I find them pathetic. Pathetic and disgusting creatures. I wish I had AIDS, then I'd spread it like wild fire. Kill all the bastards.*

(8) WOMAN: *We are all victims of social order that allows this to happen. But I don't think yours is the solution.*

(Mda 1993: 19-20)

The turn taking pattern in the above extract is constructed along the current speaker selects next option. Across the extract the Lady and the Woman select each other by name, pronoun and by question or comment. In turn 1 the Lady directs a question to the Woman voicing concern about her appearance, while in turn 2 the Woman not only gives the Lady the assurance that she is still beautiful, but also provides a topic change revealing the hostile attitude of the former towards men. In turn 3, 5 and 7 the Lady hogs the floor by taking long turns which expand the topics raised by the Woman. In her turns 4 and 6, the Woman initiates topics

on the Lady's relationships with men; in her last turn she shifts the focus from the Lady to the core of the matter. She asserts it is the "social order that allows this to happen". In other words, the social order contributes at length to the sexual betrayal of women by men. This order is the patriarchal one. In it, males are superior to everything, especially females. It places women in their gendered positions where they are treated as secondary beings whose primary role is to serve men. It is surprising that this patriarchal way of thinking is not only reinforced by men, but that women are also responsible for perpetuating this way of thinking. Mda in this play partly blames women for strengthening patriarchy, as revealed by the Lady when she says: "I thought my daughter would be my insurance in my old age..."(Mda 1993: 20) and adds, she is "an expert in the job, for she was trained by the best" (*Ibid.*). She continues claiming that she taught her daughter all she knows in terms of prostitution. This implies that women's object status is a cycle because when they grow old the young girls take over their positions. However, Mda in his play shows that this cycle can be discontinued by breaking the rule of silence. Through the character of the Woman, who is a unionist, and who ushers the Lady into the realization that they do not have to compromise their dignity, the damage caused by the social order or the system that abuses them is exposed.

Turn order reveals equal distribution of turns amongst the characters. On one hand, turn size and texture vary since the turns range from short sentences to long speeches. The linguistic style is not uniform. The Woman uses words from everyday language use to question the Lady about her relationships with men while the latter makes use of expletives in revealing her negative attitude towards men. The Woman's turns are shorter but authoritative. She controls "many of the variables of the turn-taking system" (Herman 1995:134); for example, she is "mostly cast in the role of questioner" (*Ibid.*) and she initiates exchanges. Her questions and comments are also utterances that request information from the Lady. On the contrary, the Lady is cast in the role of respondent and her turns are long. The turn length, as a floor management strategy, proves to be effective in revealing the betrayal of women in sexual terms. The Lady's lengthy speeches are most informative. They allow her to relate her history with men to the Woman;

especially how she met the Italian chef who impregnated her, made her leave university and later deserted her. She also relates her negative attitude towards men. In fact, the Lady's "super-speechmanship" (*Ibid.*: 119) exposes the role played by men's betrayal of women in placing women on the periphery of society because they are dealt with as "sexual beings" (Lakoff 1975: 27) to be used and later abandoned.

Topic management is another strategy that has been effectively used in the extract. As Herman argues, "joint orientation to topic can bind together sequences of turns and interactants towards a common purpose" (Herman 1995: 103); this is exactly what occurs in the Lady's and the Woman's exchanges in the extract above. Their conversation develops from the adjacency pair of question-answer/comment-comment which ensures interactional cooperation since they occur together (Pridham 2001). In the first question-answer pair, the Lady, in turn 1 introduces a topic concerning her looks. Even though she has been described as someone who has made "a conscious effort ...to make herself appear very chic and sexy" (Mda 1993: 4), she is still worried about her age and appearance. Her enquiry is genuine when considering "the nature of her work" (Duggan in Bell and Jacobs 2009: 52): that she needs to attract the 'johns'. The Woman in turn 2 provides an appropriate second pair part of the adjacency pair which constitutes an answer. As mentioned earlier, she assures the Lady that she is still beautiful and in the same turn she provides a topic change. In fact, all her turns prove that the topic control is generally in her hands because she is the one who initiates the other topics concerning men. The Lady does not bother to initiate her own topics. Instead, she provides the information required by the Woman. Through her comment, it's "just that men are fickle. That's the whole problem", the Woman diverts the talk from the Lady's appearance to men. The Lady, whose "interactive style is more compliant" (Herman 1995: 134), agrees with the Lady that men are unreliable. She sticks to the topic, pouring out her attitude towards men while at the same time painting a clear picture of how she has been betrayed. She successfully does this through her negative description of men: "the bastards are unreliable...they use you in many ways, and then throw you away...when they

have drained you...I hate the bastards". The Woman in turn 4 pursues the topic by advising her that she should have got herself a local man and settled down. The Lady responds with shock and argues that "they are bastards as well...They take you for granted...and ...treat you like a scum". She further reveals in her last turns that "nothing will stop her quest for revenge" (Duggan 1997: 84) because she has been used. In turn 8 the Woman, who does not regard the Lady's actions as providing a solution to their reality of being secondary beings, asserts that it is the *social order that allows this to happen*. The social order, in other words, is responsible for the denigration of women. On the whole, the sequences of turns have successfully created "interactional cooperativeness" (Herman 1995: 129) because the questions used to introduce the different topics in the extract were answered and comments were followed by comments. The Lady who has been cast as the respondent takes up topics with interest, "as implicated by the length of turns" (Bennison in Culpeper et al 1998:73), allowing the reader or audience to gain a full picture of the intensity of betrayal of women in terms of sex. In her description of men based on her experience, she has proven beyond doubt that the sexual betrayal of women is one factor that largely contributes to their subordinate status. In turn 5, for example, the message is loud and clear when she says "local men? They are bastards as well". She understands patriarchy as a concept not "only practiced by western men like the Italian..., but is pervasive" (Mazibuko 2007:12). It is there to exploit and demean women.

It is worth noting that it is not only the Lady who has been betrayed sexually; the Woman in the following extract reveals her betrayal, as mentioned, perhaps by the same Italian chef who married the Lady.

(1) WOMAN: *When I went to Cape Town for the first time it was with a man.*

(2) LADY: *So what's wrong with that?*

(3) WOMAN: *He was my boss.*

(4) LADY: *Yeah?*

(5) WOMAN: *I ran away with my boss to Cape Town. He was a young man
oaLetaliana. I was his maid. I looked after his house while he ran his
restaurant business.*

(6) LADY: *See how strange life is?*

(7) WOMAN: *He was a philanderer, Letalianaleo. Brought different women
home every day. Mostly ladies of the night. But oh, he was charming, with
an impish sense of humour. It was the easiest thing to fall in love with him.*

(8) LADY: *Same with mine. These Mataliana are all like that it seems.*

(Mda 1993:24)

In the excerpt above, turn change occurs by current speaker selecting next option. The interactants select each other by directing questions, comments or statements. Turn change on the whole is smoothly achieved while turn order also reveals equal distribution of turns.

Turn length is one strategy that has been manipulated by the dramatist in the extract to uncover the sufferings of women in the hands of men. Turn size and texture vary, but not drastically. The Lady's turns are short. They "signify urgency" (Herman 1995: 121). They are the types of questions that request details as in turn 2, when she says "so what's wrong with that?" According to Pridham (2001: 26), "as the urgency of the question increases, the length of the question decreases". In her turn 4, for example, The Lady asks a one word question, "yeah?" It expresses shock. This type of question is "forceful in provoking a response" (*Ibid.*) as implicated in the Woman's turn 5 which is longer compared to her initial turns. Having discovered their similar experience of betrayal, in her last turn, she agrees with the Woman that the Italians are all the same. The Woman's turn lengths vary from short to long complex sentences; she uses them to reveal her exploitation by the Italian chef. Her first turn is a compound sentence which she uses to confide to the Lady that she is not perfect because in Cape Town she had first been with a man. Her turn 3 is short but explicit. She reveals that the man she eloped with was her boss. Her last two turns are longer; here, she exposes the Italian as having been her boss. In turn 5 she says, "I ran away with my boss...I was his maid". The

Woman openly depicts the extent to which women are oppressed by patriarchal structures. Men, in spite of their racial differences, have been proven to oppress women. Like the Lady who is a sex worker, the Woman has to get laid by the Italian in order to earn a living. She is thus not different from the Lady; they are all “victims of a social order” (Mda 1993: 20), as she puts it. In her long turn, turn 7, she says the chef “...was a *philanderer*...” This suggests that the Woman was doubly affected. Besides being taken advantage of, she became one of the women that the Italian enjoyed sexual encounters with and whom he later abandoned. In short, through the use of the turn length strategy, Mda has not only revealed the vulnerable positions of women who are taken advantage of by their bosses, he has also successfully uncovered the painful fact of the “objectified position” (Diamond Elin cited in Aston 1995: 93) of the female body “in the male gaze” (*Ibid.*).

4.4. The theme of poverty

And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses, as noted earlier, is a play set in post independence Lesotho, a country with a “desolate landscape and the stark poverty that characterized most peasant households” (Peterson 1993: viii). Ebewo (2009:27) also observes that Lesotho “is nothing but a labour reserve: a land eroded and overgrazed, the general condition is one of impoverishment”. The following demonstrates the gravity of the situation:

The Lady has finished eating her share, and she gives what remains to The Woman. Pause.

(1) LADY: *It is the third day now.*

(2) WOMAN: *Fourth.*

(3) LADY: *Third.*

(4) WOMAN: *For me it is the fourth.*

(5) LADY: *And you managed without the chair. The first day, I mean before I came.*

(6) WOMAN: *It had not rained then. I sat on the ground.*

(7) LADY: *Yeah. It's wet all over now, so you need my chair. We need each other because I also need the food that you buy for both of us. You see, I didn't bring any money with me, and...*

(Mda 1993: 5)

In the extract, turn change is achieved by current speaker selecting next. The characters select each other by directing a comment or by the pronoun 'you'. Turn change is smoothly achieved while turn order also reveals equal distribution of turns.

For both characters, turns vary from short, one word to sentences of even length. Both characters use their turns to highlight the desperation of the poor through their disagreement over the number of days spent waiting in the queue. It is the Lady's last turn that is noticeably longer compared to the other turns. She uses this to confirm that despite her 'sexy' appearance, she is poor and lacks a basic need, food.

The sequencing strategy has played a considerable role in constructing the course of the interaction. The extract begins with a stage direction preparing the audience for the Lady's first turn, which functions as the closure of a previous interaction and also introduces the new topic on the time they have spent in the queue. The Lady's first turn begins with the pause strategy which conveys the utterance's "tentativeness" (Piazza 1999: 1008) and enables the speaker to think or attempt "to recall or focus on relevant aspects" (Herman 1995: 95). It is also used "to highlight something about to be said" (*Ibid.*), which in this case is the number of days in the queue. The first four exchanges, therefore, are repairs "displaying disagreement" (Piazza: 1020) on the number of days. They are 'other-initiated self-repair' and 'other-initiated other repair'.

The Lady's turn 1, "the trouble source" (Liddicoat 2007: 174) describes a problem based on the appropriate number of days. The Lady's utterance, "it's the third day now", causes the woman in turn 2 to initiate the repair, "fourth" and the Lady's turn 3 is a self repair to the previous response. Turn 4 is an other-initiated and other-

repair. The Woman is the recipient of the repairable item, “third”, uttered by the Lady in her turn 3 and the former resolves it in turn 4 when she says “for me it is the fourth”. The Lady’s turn 5 when she says “and you managed without the chair. The first day, I mean before I came”, is also a repair sequence. It is self initiated and self repaired because the Lady who is the speaker of “the repairable item both indicates the problem in the talk and resolves it” (*Ibid.*:173). In other words, her utterance triggers “self correction” (Piazza 1999: 1008). The repair highlights the fact that the Woman has been in the queue for a day before the Lady arrives. In the same turn the lady introduces her notion of sharing the chair with the Woman. The Woman in her turn 6 emphasizes the effects of poverty since they are prepared to stay outdoors and be exposed to harsh weather conditions just for a cheap bag of rice. Similarly, the Lady in her last turn reveals that she is also destitute and prepared to share her chair with the Woman in exchange for food that the Woman buys in a local store.

In a nut shell, bearing in mind that Piazza’s assertion that *other repairs* are “strongly rooted in disagreement” (*Ibid.*: 1014), the repair sequences have been successfully used to draw attention to the impoverished positions of the women through their disagreement on the number of days they have spent in the queue. This reveals their marginalized status and exploitation that emanate from their social responsibility of caring for their families. As care givers, they are the ones who experience the gruesome effects of poverty. They have become less human since they are made to live in subhuman conditions. The denigrated status of the women is clearly shown by the Lady who has accepted her situation because she takes a chair with her so that she can relax as she waits for the bureaucrats. Her ‘waiting’ suggests that she is not doing anything about the whole situation. The Woman tells her that “when they violate you, you wait...you have a patience of a saint”(Mda 1993: 33). She has actually accepted the forces that place them in this precarious condition. Steel supports this view and argues that the chair is “a symbol of the moral, physical and mental abuse” (Steel 1999: 123) experienced by the women as they “wait...and wait...and wait...” (*Ibid.*).

4.5. The theme of prostitution

In postcolonial African literature, prostitution is presented as a “consequence of the sexual and physical violence and assault on women, especially in the form of rape...” (Nwahunanya 2011:346). However, in the play at hand the Lady joins the profession by choice. She is bent on revenge. She asserts, “I have been used. So I use them. The men I sleep with, in them I see the Italian chef. All of them are representative of him. That is why I am going to lay them to death, and take their money to boot. I hate the bastards...” (Mda 1993: 20). As the play progresses it turns out that the act of prostitution is not only about vengeance: it is employed to “emphasize the generally subjugated condition of...women” (Nwahunanya: 342) in postcolonial African states where they are still considered as objects.

Prostitution in the play is also presented as a “survival strategy in times of extreme economic hardship” (*Ibid.*: 347). Duggan strikes the same note in describing it as “an issue of poverty not sexuality” (Duggan 1997: 83). Even though in the first scene the Lady has been described in negative terms, somebody who is concerned about her appearance because of the nature of her work, when she confides to the Woman that “we were not millionaires but we had enough to eat...I went to a private school and even up to university. Attempted a B.A. Didn’t finish though”, (Mda 1993: 13), and when she reveals that she is destitute, it becomes evident that prostitution is an adjunct of poverty. The Lady’s assertion about her social status shows that the postcolonial society presented in the play is engulfed by real social problems. These social challenges impoverish the people even further. The Lady, even though she has an educated background, fails to survive in such a society. She remains destitute; the only option left to her is prostitution. Even the office girls who are perceived as economically better off are prostitutes because the Lady asserts that for the office girls to survive they get laid. Prostitution in this case is a “result of women struggling for survival and therefore becomes an economic necessity” (Wasosa 2011: 29). It reflects the failure of the leaders of the society presented in the play to meet the people’s needs.

The dramatist sympathizes with her female character, the Lady, who is a sex worker, and also with the office girls who prostitute themselves in order to keep their jobs. He blames the system of government for being responsible for the predicament women find themselves in. This is expressed by the Woman when she says: "Is it not through politics that the laws that have created these terrible conditions for us are made?"(Mda 1993: 26). An extract where prostitution is examined follows:

The Lady holds the Woman tight in an attempt to stop her from going. The Woman tries to break loose.

(1) WOMAN: *Let go off me, bloody whore! What do you want from me, eh? What is it that you want from me?*

(2) LADY *[pleading]: Please don't go. How am I going to live without you? [She kneels] Look, I am kneeling down on the wet ground in my beautiful dress pleading and begging.*

(3) WOMAN: *I thought as much. It is my money you are so much interested in. If I go you'll have to find another victim who'll buy you meals while you wait in your perpetual queue.*

(4) LADY: *[standing and mustering as much dignity as she can]: I am broke. I don't have a cent in my name. The only money I have is the ten bucks with which I'll pay for rice. That's all.*

(5) WOMAN: *[coming back]: But you led me to believe you were a prosperous street walker.*

(6) LADY: *[greatly offended]: I am not a street walker. I have never stood at street corners waiting for clients to come and pick me up in their cars. No one can claim to have ever seen me in front of the Victoria Hotel soliciting for the clientele. I am not an orphan of the night. I am a courtesan. A courtesan, do you hear that?*

7) WOMAN: *Okay, I am sorry. You are a courtesan, Whatever that means.*

(8) LADY: *It means that my clients are from the upper crust of the society. I entertain Ministers and Ambassadors. I am a high class hooker. I service rich capitalists when they come to town on business.*

(9) WOMAN: *Then what are you doing on this queue with low-lives like us?*

(10) LADY: *I am broke, I told you.*

(11) WOMAN: *Courtesans don't make enough to make ends meet these days?*

(12) LADY *[Breaking down and weeping controllably]: Oh, sister woman. I am old. I don't know what to do.*

(13) WOMAN *[trying to comfort her]: You are not old. You're only forty. You are still a beautiful woman.*

(14) LADY: *They don't come any more. The johns don't come any more.*

(15) WOMAN: *Johns?*

(16) LADY: *The clients. The customers. The johns. The young girls have taken over. Teenage whores line the streets by the dozens, and no one wants to screw us old whores any more. The competition is hard, sister woman, very hard. And now we are dying of hunger.*

(17) WOMAN: *And you've read books, and you've a lot of learning. You could have easily become like one of the office girls who have been coming in and out of this yard in their beautiful Sunday dresses.*

(18) LADY *[pride taking over again]: What's the difference? Many of them have to sleep with someone to get their jobs. They have to lay some dirty old man to get a promotion. We are in the same profession, sister woman. Only I do it openly and on my terms, as a free agent. They get laid and still have to sit behind office desks and typewriters before they can get their porridge...*

(Mda 1993: 17-19)

In the extract turn change is achieved by current speaker selecting next option. The characters select each other by name, the pronoun 'you' and by directing a question or comment. Turn change is achieved smoothly. Turn order also reveals equal distribution of turns among the characters. In almost all the turns, the Lady's

affairs are central. All the topics raised by the Woman allude to the Lady's affairs. Only in turn 18 does the Lady shift the topic away from herself to the office girls.

Turn size and texture vary. In the first four turns the characters' turns are equally long. From turn 5-16 the Woman's turns are short. In all her turns she directs questions and comments to the Lady; these request information from her. Her last turn is noticeably longer compared to her other turns as she uses it to provide unsolicited advice. She suggests that the Lady's exposure to learning could have led her to become like the office girls who are beautiful in their Sunday dresses. The Lady's turns are a mixture of short and long turns which she uses to provide responses to the Woman's questions and comments. Her turns 6, 8, 16 and 18 take the form of speeches because of their informative nature as regards prostitution.

The topic strategy has played a huge role in portraying the fact of prostitution in the extract. The topic control is generally in the Woman's hands. She is the one who gives turns to the Lady as she initiates most of the topics. The action begins with a stage direction informing the audience about the Lady's attempt to stop the Woman from leaving without purchasing the donated rice. The Woman's turn 1 introduces the first topic on trying to break loose. She raises a concern as to why the Lady is trying to stop her from going when she asks "what do you want from me, eh?" In turn 2 the Lady pleads with the Woman not to go; "please don't go. How am I going to live without you?" Particularly interesting in this topic is the wider implication of a 'dependency syndrome'. Peterson observed that Mda in *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* has directed his attention to the "problems of dependency in Lesotho" (Peterson in Mda 1993: xix). Ebewo also hits the same note when he says the play discusses the "repercussions of Lesotho's dependency on foreign aid" (Ebewo 2009: 27). Both women have come to buy the donated rice but when the Woman decides to go, the Lady thinks it is impossible to survive without her. The reason for such behaviour is provided by the Woman in her turn 3 when she says, "I thought as much. It is my money you are so much interested in. If I go you'll have to find another victim who'll buy you meals...". This implies

that the whole system of aid has created a dependency mindset and culture. People are consequently unable to stand on their own feet and endeavor to improve their living conditions themselves. The Lady feels incapable of doing anything for herself. She represents all the women who have been disempowered by the political system that has no structures in place to empower them, except to sell them the food aid. The Lady confirms this situation in turn 4 when she asserts that she is broke except for the ten rand that she will use to pay for the rice.

In turn 5 the Woman initiates another topic, namely, the Lady's sexual behaviour and calls her a street walker. The Lady takes the topic and launches into a long speech, arguing that she is not a street walker but a courtesan. She deals with rich clients. The women keep to the same topic up to turn 8 where the Lady gives a list of the different kinds of rich clients she deals with. The major aspect of the topic is the revelation that the Lady prostitutes herself for money. When she declares that she is a courtesan, it becomes obvious that "prostitution is an issue of poverty" (Duggan 1997: 83). During this time of great hardship in postcolonial Lesotho, the Lady perceives prostitution as the only method of survival. Poverty, therefore, emphasizes the subjugated condition of women. It has dehumanized women to objects, to commodities bought by men to satisfy their sexual desires.

The Woman in turn 9, drops the topic on the types of clients that the Lady deals with and initiates a slightly different one concerning what the Lady is doing in the queue with 'low lives' like them. The Lady responds by stating that she is broke. The Woman in her turn 11 demands an explanation of why she became destitute, considering the type of clients she deals with. In turn 12 and 14 the Lady expresses her frustration that she is old and "the johns don't come any more". To her, prostitution is a way of earning a living. It empowers her to become economically independent but when the 'johns' reject her because of old age, she returns to the cycle of poverty. In her long turn 16, she explains that the 'johns' prefer teenage girls. Once the women become old they leave them and look for young girls. She describes them negatively in the same scene. She says men "*use you...*" (Mda 1993: 19) and "*when they have drained you of all flesh and blood*" (*Ibid.*) they

“*throw you away*” (*Ibid.*). In short, men have no respect for women. They are out to exploit and destroy women’s self esteem.

The Woman provides a topic change again in her last turn. She makes a comment that the Lady’s education could have assisted her in landing a well paid job and affording attractive clothing, like the office girls. However, the Lady’s response does what Brown and Yule “describes as speaking on a topic, rather than ‘speaking topically’” (Brown and Yule cited by Bennison in Culpeper et al 1998: 71) because she “ignores the previous speaker’s utterance in order to develop a new topic” (*Ibid.*). Instead of talking about herself in terms of improving her life as someone who has been exposed to learning, she hogs the floor and, throughout her long speech, she reveals that there is no difference between her and the office girls. Like her, “the office girls have been unofficially prostituting themselves to get either their jobs or promotions and therefore are all in the same profession” (Bell and Jacobs 2009: 52-53). She says for them to earn a living “they get laid and still have to sit behind office desks and typewriters...”. On the whole, the topic strategy reveals Mda’s “empathy and understanding of women” (Lombardozi 2002:100) that their impoverished position contributes to their “sexually loose attitudes” (Ibinga 2007: 37) or prostitution, which further perpetuates their subjugation. Mda, in short, recognizes that the women’s promiscuous lifestyle is a result of their desperate condition.

Prostitution has been discussed above as a consequence of poverty and as one factor that contributes to women’s subordinate status. Mda has used his female protagonist, the Lady, to present the face of prostitution and, for her to effectively take this role, he has physically portrayed her as someone who is obsessed with her appearance. The focus of the study will now shift to the Lady’s obsession with appearance and its relationship with women’s social positions.

4.5.1. The Lady’s obsession with appearance

According to Lakoff (1975: 27)

a woman's reputation and position in society depends wholly on the impression she makes upon others, how others view her. She must dress decoratively; look attractive, if she is to survive at all in the world.

This view is explored by Mda who begins scene 1 with a description of the physical appearance of the Lady. She is said to be "a bit overdressed, albeit in the latest fashion". She has made "a conscious effort to look very chic and sexy...she dabs a little powder on her cheeks" and "on her lap is all the paraphernalia used in make-up".

In this section I shall proceed to analyze the excerpt below in order to ascertain the extent to which the Lady's obsession with appearance reveals the status of women in this society:

(1) LADY: ...But, you see, to put you at ease- for you seem concerned with the thickness of my make-up- contrary to what many of you civilians may believe. I wear it thick because my skin is in a mess. Messed up by the follies of youth.

(2) WOMAN: I can see that. Not the follies of youth, I mean. The skin.

(3) LADY: Yeah it's in a mess. Got messed up when I was a little girl. You remember the skin lightening creams we used, eh?

(4) WOMAN: Very well, Ambi Extra, Artra...

(5) LADY: Super Rose and all the rest. When we were girls we used them, cause we wanted to be white. We bloody hated ourselves, so we used them. They've got something called hydroquinone in them, but we didn't know it then. All we wanted was to have white skins. Hydroquinone, sister woman, it destroys your skin

(Mda 1993: 8)

The turn change option used in this extract is the current speaker selecting next option. The characters select each other by directing a question or comment and by the pronoun 'you'. Turn change on the whole is smoothly achieved. There is however, an interruption in the Woman's turn, effected by the Lady in

turn 6, which can be best described as “a small amount of overlap” (Liddicoat 2007: 82) because “the term interruption is reserved for problematic overlaps” (*Ibid.*). In this case, the overlap signals the Lady’s “attentiveness and eagerness to contribute” (Herman 1995: 113) to the Woman’s speech.

Turn size and texture vary. The Lady’s turns are longer and she uses them to explain why she wears thick make up. The Woman’s turns are short. She gives the Lady “supportive, minimal responses” (*Ibid.*: 161), not as a sign of weakness, but to “ratify floor rights” (*Ibid.*). Turn order also reveals equal distribution of turns.

The turn length and sequencing strategies, particularly the repair sequence and adjacency pairing, have played a huge role in the structuring of the course of the action. The interaction begins smoothly with the Lady who explains that she wears her make-up thick because her skin is in a mess. She says it was damaged by the “follies of youth”. The Woman in her response initiates a repair, “I can see that. Not the follies of youth, I mean”. She then quickly makes a self-repair, “the skin”. Piazza (1999: 1004) observes that self-initiated self-repairs are “less problematic”, in line with this, the Woman’s repair sequence is a request for more information about the condition of the skin. In fact it signals “active listenership and support” (Coates in Coates and Cameron 1988: 119) for the Lady and also “marks recognition of the different stages of the interactional development” (*Ibid.*). The Lady’s turn 3 is a clarification of what had really damaged her skin; the structural device used to build this conversation is the adjacency pair of question and answer. The Lady directs a closed question: “do you remember the skin lightening creams we used eh?” The nature of the question implies that she expects a “confirmation...rather than a lengthy discussion” (Pridham 2001: 26). It is “a device to check...” (*Ibid.*: 25) the Woman’s “interaction rather than a genuine enquiry” (*Ibid.*). This supplies the reason why when the Woman replies, “very well. Ambi extra, Artra...”, she interrupts her and holds the floor in turn 5 to relate the history of the lightening creams. The turn length strategy has been effectively used

because it allows the Lady to reveal that when they were girls they wanted to be white. They hated their black skin. This suggests that “beauty and whiteness” (Peterson in Mda 1993: xx) were “synonymous” (*Ibid.*). Black women had been brainwashed by the socio-political system into thinking that their blackness could not be equated with beauty; as a result they attempted to “deface their blackness with skin lightening creams” (*Ibid.*). According to Dhruva Balram (2016), this kind of discrimination is a “hangover from the colonial period” that allowed whiteness to still be associated with beauty, wealth and better opportunities, thus obliging women like the Lady not only to attempt to erase their identity, but also to feel insecure about their appearance. This view is further explored in the extract below:

(1) WOMAN: *Yeah. I have seen people whose skins are completely destroyed. The whole face!*

(2) LADY: *So that’s why I use this stuff. To hide all the ugly blemishes. [She has finished her make-up] There! You see! As good as new. You try some of this stuff too.*

(3) WOMAN: *No thanks.*

(4) LADY: *How old are you?*

(5) WOMAN: *About forty.*

(6) LADY: *See what I mean? We are about the same age, but look at you. Frumpy!*

(7) WOMAN: *I think I am alright the way I am.*

(8) LADY: *You think so. But do other people think so? We are not so selfish as to look beautiful for our own selves, you know. We do it for other people, so that they should have something to admire.*

(Mda 1993: 9)

The sequencing strategies, topic and turn size are all involved in constructing the action in the extract. Turn change is effected by current speaker selecting next option. In terms of turn size, the Woman’s turns are short and she uses them mostly to provide responses to the Lady’s questions and comments. The Lady’s

turns are also short except for turn 2 and 6 which are longer because she uses them to provide explanations of why she uses make-up.

In the first pair, turn 1-2, the Woman initiates the conversation by making a comment on people whose skins have been completely destroyed. The Lady utters a follow up comment in her turn 2 and reveals that she uses make-up “*to hide all the ugly blemishes*”. The implication is that she does so in order to improve her appearance. Turn 3 develops from the first pair as the focus is still on the make-up, and the Woman shows no interest in using it herself as the Lady has suggested. In turn 4-5 the Lady initiates the question-answer sequence; through her question she effects a slight topic shift enquiring how old the Woman is. The Woman provides the second part of the pair, “*about forty*”, which is also developed by the next pair where the Lady openly claims that they are of the same age but the Woman looks frumpy because she does not apply make-up on her face. In the last comment-comment pair the Woman asserts that she is fine the way she is. She provokes a response from the Lady who in her longer turn, boasts: “we are not so selfish as to look beautiful for our own selves...we do it for other people, so that they should have something to admire”. This assertion is similar to her declaration that they had applied skin lightening creams because they wanted to be white, a colour associated with beauty. They needed to look beautiful. Likewise, she applies make-up because she wants “to look beautiful for...other people” (Peterson in Mda 1993: xx). In fact, the Lady declares that “...*we have to be sexually attractive-physically...it’s all part of the job*” (29). In short, women live their lives trying to create optical illusions that position them as beautiful, in an attempt to find validation in love relationships and society at large. They “exist only as a reflection in the eyes of others” (Lakoff 1975: 27) and lack an identity of their own as it has been buried not only by the skin lightening creams, but also by the make-up that is aimed at concealing parts of their skin which they consider to be ugly.

In addition to his work in addressing issues on subordination of women, Mda also manages to explore the extent to which men have been denigrated by women. This will be demonstrated in the discussion below.

4.5.2. Denigration of men

Both women in the play have a low opinion of men. The women see them as slaves “mostly to their attitudes” (Mda 1993:27) because they are “dwelling on the glories of their ancestors” (Duggan 1997: 84). Men still believe they are the dominant gender. The excerpt below demonstrates the portrayal of their denigration:

(1) WOMAN: *Look at you now. All scared and worried because the johns don't come any more. That's the problem with your kind of job. Old age comes quite early. And there is no insurance against that.*

(2) LADY: *There is insurance. It's just that I was unfortunate, things didn't work out for me. I thought my daughter would be my insurance in my old age. You should see her, she is a beautiful little thing. An expert in the job, for she was trained by the best. But a good for nothing brat who doesn't care for her mama who brought her into the world and taught her all she knows. One of the major insurance policies, of course, is marriage. All of us, as we do our rounds, we are looking for a john who will fall head over heels, and marry. There are many of us who are married all over Europe, married by former clients...Married by European businessman, contractors engineers...The women now lead respectable lives as housewives...Others have forged careers for themselves. Only a few days ago, I met one of my colleagues. She is visiting home...from Switzerland where she has a successful marriage and a successful career as a singer...*

(Mda 1993: 20-21)

The most effective strategy that is involved in showing the denigrated status of men is the turn length. The Woman and the Lady conduct their interaction via a smooth turn change: it is the Woman who initiates the comment-comment sequence which is played out in very long turns. She expresses her concern regarding the type of job the Lady has and claims that it offers no security because “*old age comes quite early*”. The ‘johns’, the source of her current economic independence, will stay away when they deem her to be too old. The Lady provides the second pair part in a very long speech where she justifies her viewpoint that

there is insurance in her job. She views men as insurance and argues that she even trained her daughter to become “an expert in the job” with the hope that she would take care of her in her old age. She also perceives men only in terms of insurance for women through marriage. She cites the example of her colleague who married a Swiss man and claims that she not only became a respectable housewife, but also secured a career and became a singer. This implies that men are “not only seen as passports to financial security and status, but as providing a way out of their impoverished and corrupt country” (Duggan in Bell and Jacobs 2009: 52).

To this point, focus has fallen on marginalization of women and how they have themselves denigrated men. It is however, also necessary to show that Mda has empowered his female characters by making them play a decisive role in shaping their destiny. This is achieved through an analysis of the theme of corruption which is dealt with in the next section.

4.6. The theme of corruption

The said theme has been investigated by Peterson who observes that:

In *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* Mda...shows how the gains of independence are denied the general populace by a self satisfied, inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy. The depth of exploitation in the society is such that food donated by Western governments as aid to the poor- is itself nothing more than a recreation of their cycle of poverty- is either sold by the government or made available to business for purchase and further merchandizing.

(Peterson in Mda 1993: xi)

Mda in this play not only criticizes the corrupt bureaucracy which obliges the general public to purchase donated rice, but also condemns the inefficiency of all public services. The following provides a depiction of these issues:

(1) WOMAN: *So you knew we we're going to be here for days.*

- (2) **LADY:** *Not really.*
- (3) **WOMAN:** *Then how come you brought a chair with you?*
- (4) **LADY:** *Because I know that the wheels of government move slowly.*
- (5) **WOMAN:** *Maybe you'll explain that.*
- (6) **LADY:** *I can see you are new in this country.*
- (7) **WOMAN:** *I was born here.*
- (8) **LADY:** *But you don't live here, I'm sure.*
- (9) **WOMAN:** *Well, I work in Cape Town. In Mowbray. I am a flat cleaner there.*
- (10) **LADY:** *That's why you are not used to the waiting game. I have lived here all my life. I know about the waiting game. You are a novice. An absolute amateur.*
- (11) **WOMAN:** *I think I am beginning to know about the waiting game.*
- (12) **LADY:** *You don't know half the story. Let me tell you. When I go to the post office to buy a stamp, I take my chair with me. When I go to the bank to draw money-I used to have a respectable balance in my account, by the way- I take my chair with me. Why, because I know there is going to be a lot of waiting there. When I go to government offices for any service whatsoever I know I have to wait while bureaucrats have endless conversations about their lovers and the great parties they have been attending lately. You go to these offices, sister woman, and the particular person who has been assigned to deal with your particular case has gone out...sister woman all of us spend ninety five percent of our working hours waiting.*
- (Mda 1993: 9-11)

The turn change option used in the extract is current speaker selecting next option. The characters select each other by directing a question or comment and by the pronoun 'you'. Turn change is smoothly achieved.

The characters' turn sizes are almost equal. Only in the last turn does the Lady extend her floor rights to disclose the severity of the bureaucratic corruption. The

Woman's turns, especially in turn 1-5, are used to request information from the Lady; from turn 6-12 the latter responds to her questions.

The sequencing strategies, topic and turn length are all involved in the structuring of the action. From turn 1-5, the Woman is in control of the conversation as she is the dominant partner who initiates the exchanges. In the first comment-comment pair, the Woman introduces the topic about the Lady who seems familiar with the game of waiting. The Lady, in her second pair part, provides a withheld answer, "not really". The Woman in her turn 3 then initiates a repair demanding a more precise answer by asking: "then how come you brought a chair with you?" In turn 4 the Lady makes a self repair: "because I know that the wheel of government move slowly", implying that the government is inefficient. The Woman's turn 5 provides a slight topic change. She requests the Lady to explain her previous utterance on the inefficiency of the government. From this turn to turn 12 the interaction is developed by insertion sequences which prolong the interaction since the Lady fails to provide a satisfactory response to the Woman's question in turn 5. She complicates "the structure of the basic pair" (Herman 1995: 84) with various insertion sequences where she comments that the Woman must be new to Lesotho, which is why she does not know the 'waiting game'. The insertion sequences take the following format: Q5 C6C7 C8C9 C10C11 A12. The original question in turn 5 (Q5), asked by the Woman, is "completed by its relevant..." (*Ibid.*: 85) A12 (answer in turn 12). Through the turn length strategy, the Lady in her turn 12 eventually draws attention the inefficiency of the government. As Herman (1995: 118-119) asserts, "long speeches can be used to fulfill...a reactive tendency in drama, when a character's speech is not goal-directed and targeted at another, but purely experience directed", the Lady who is experienced in the 'game of waiting', hogs the floor and criticizes the inefficiency of all the public services. She describes the post offices, banks and any other government office as places of waiting while officials continue with their "endless conversations" (Duggan 1997: 80) about their private lives. Through the Lady's long speech Mda has shown how the government has disempowered the public. He has caused the Lady to

represent all the people who are physically and mentally abused by the system that leaves them with “no recourse but to the chair of patience (*Ibid.*: 81).

4.6.1. Women as agents of change

Even though Peterson argues that Mda casts his female protagonists as “broadly representative of a diverse range of marginalised and exploited social groups” (Peterson in Mda 1993: xxi), the extract above (section 4.6.) does reveal Mda to be sympathetic towards the marginalised, as represented by the Lady and the Woman. He has used them to “conscientise and mobilise the oppressed” (Deviant in Mda 1993: xxviii) and also to reveal their “aspirations and frustrations” (*Ibid.*). An excerpt follows where Mda has not only used the Woman as a tool to conscientise and to mobilise the oppressed, but has also empowered her to become an agent of change:

(1) LADY: I don't see why you should be irritable. It's not my fault that these people are going home without serving us. Ah, they are coming. Let's greet them nicely. It humours them.

The Woman sits down on the chair.

(2) WOMAN: I am not going to do that. I am sick and tired of kowtowing to these bastards who don't have any regard for us.

The Lady waves feebly.

(3) LADY [wanly]: Good night, my lords and masters. Do have sweet dreams.

(4) WOMAN: I say let them all go and fry in hell.

(5) LADY: Sh... They'll hear you.

(6) WOMAN: Of course I want them to hear me

(7) LADY: Shit, why did I sit with you here?

(8) WOMAN: We both didn't have a choice. We are in a queue.

(9) LADY: Listen, I know the system, ok? You just come from Cape Town and you want to mess up everything for everybody. Those people are civil servants, do you hear that? You don't just talk to them as though they are the woman who sells fat cakes at the street corner.

(10) WOMAN:*Listen, I think I am going home now.*

(11) LADY:*Why? You don't want the rice anymore?*

(12) WOMAN:*I need the rice, but I am not prepared to wallow in degradation for it.*

(Mda 1993: 16)

In the extract turn change is achieved by both current speaker selecting next and next speaker self selects option. Characters select each other by directing questions or comments and by the pronoun 'you'. Turn change is smoothly achieved while the turn order reveals equal distribution of turns.

Turn size and texture vary. The Lady's turns vary from short to long ones and she uses them to reveal her respect for the government officials despite the "treatment they mete out to the patient queue" (Duggan 1997: 80). The Woman's turns are short, she utilizes them to show disregard for the officials.

The most effective strategy in portraying women as agents of change is the topic strategy and turn length. The interaction begins smoothly with the Lady telling the Woman that they should greet the government officials politely even though they go home without even serving them. Greeting, "in the African tradition...is a very important aspect of social relationships. When people greet each other, it is a symbol of respect and of communal values. It shows that people respect each other" (Ebewo 2003: 138). What is surprising in the Lady's utterance is her preparedness to offer such respect to officials who have no regard for them as the Woman points out in turn 2: "*I am not going to do that. I am sick and tired of kowtowing to these bastards who don't have any regard for us*". The Woman is not prepared to greet the civil servants who lack respect for the public they serve. In turn 3 when the Lady makes her exaggerated polite greetings, the Woman grabs the turn to express her disapproval. She says, "*...let them all go and fry in hell*". In turn 6 she asserts that she wants her message to be heard as she is tired of the corrupt ways of the bureaucracy. However, she does not receive interpersonal support on this topic. The Lady provides a topic change in turn 7 to enquire, rhetorically, why she sat with the Woman in the queue. Again in turn 9, the Lady

provides a topic change and launches into a longer turn with directives on how to behave because “*those people are civil servants*” and no one is expected “to talk to them as though they are the woman who sells fat cakes at the street corner”. The Lady’s comment is not only denigrating to the women selling fat cakes, it also exposes the privileged position of the new dispensation. However, Mda who has successfully emphasized the subordinate position of women, also “wants women to view themselves as agents, capable of making choices about their lives” (Lombardozi 2002: 97) because the Woman in all her turns takes a stand not to kowtow to the government officials. In turn 10 and 11 where she decides to go home and not “to wallow in degradation”, Mda confirms her as “the general vehicle of social change (*Ibid.*). He has endowed her with the courage and confidence to face the system by condemning its “new forms of corruption and exploitation” (Cloete and Madadzhe 2007: 41). This assertion is even emphasized at the end of the play when the Lady takes a decisive action: “to hell with the rice! I’m going home, and I know that never again will I need the food-aid rice, and my chair of patience...” (37). This symbolizes their union “against the neocolonial system that abuses them” (Mazibuko 2007: 12). By deciding to stop aiding the bureaucratic corruption, the women are not only asserting their dignity, they are also taking a lead in breaking the syndrome of dependence. They refuse to be dependent on foreign aid, a culture that emphasizes their impoverished position. Through the character of the Lady and the Women, therefore, Mda encourages women not to sit by and watch social ills happen. He recognizes their strength and capability in bringing about change in their societies.

4.7. Conclusion

The study of dramatic dialogue in *And the Girls in Their Sunday Dresses* has helped to demonstrate how women in certain societies are still marginalized. This inquiry has however, established that it is not only women who are marginalized; men also fall into the trap of being denigrated by women. Through a close study of the theme of corruption, it has been discovered that Mda has empowered his

female characters with courage not to 'wallow in degradation' but to become agents of social change.

CHAPTER FIVE: *YOU FOOL, HOW CAN THE SKY FALL?*

5.1. Introduction

Two of the themes that Mda explores in this play are corruption and female political engagement. The latter theme is the focus of the study as it exposes other sub themes that indicate the different positions of women in society and the asymmetrical power relations between genders in the political arena. The chapter begins with a summary of the play together with an overview of previous analyses of the play. This will be followed by a discussion of the theme of female political engagement with its sub themes which include gender stereotyping and gendered roles (see point 5.3-5.3.2). The Minister of Health's status will be discussed in section 5.4 while the issues of violence against women will be dealt with in point

5.4.1. Section 5.5 concentrates on the subversion of male dominance; finally, section 5.6 provides a summary of the insights drawn from this play.

5.2. You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall

The play was first produced at the Windybrow Theatre Centre for the Arts in January 1995; it was directed by Peter Se-puma. It is a portrayal of nepotism in the government of an unnamed country that has just attained political independence. The main characters include the President, the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Health. There is only one ordinary citizen, the Young Man. Since the play explores the betrayal of the revolution by the new ruling elite, it becomes necessary for Mda to use the political roles to name his characters as they are the ones who form the new dispensation. Because the study's focus is on gender issues, it is also important to note that the Minister of Health is the lone female character in the play: her conversations with the male characters assist in revealing the fact that even women in the political arena are not immune to male dominance.

The President and his Cabinet Ministers are confined in what looks like a prison cell under inhuman conditions throughout the play. However, they are presented as being comfortable with such unhealthy conditions, in order to highlight the extent of their corrupt practices. Mda has used filth to symbolize the rottenness of the Cabinet Ministers. They never discuss anything regarding the improvement of the standard of living of the people. They either compete for the attention of the female character, the Minister of Health, or accuse each other of betraying the 'cause'. The suffering of the masses is represented by the Daughters of the Revolution who are the only real threat to the dominance of the President and his Cabinet. Throughout the play the Ministers are taken away one after another by unidentified shadowy figures for interrogation and torture; at the end of the play the President is revealed to be the dictator who orders these actions.

In his analysis of the play, Uwah observes that Mda expresses the inadequacies of a post-liberation regime comprising a Cabinet that is responsible for protecting

the interests of the people but whose members “trivialize this responsibility” (Uwah 2004: 94) since they have “very little interest in fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the people they govern” (*Ibid.*). Goodman (2002: 242) earlier made the same point when he observed that the Cabinet Ministers abuse their power to the extent of controlling the media so that “when the daughter of the Minister of Agriculture gets married, the President decrees that for a week all television programmes should carry nothing but news and interviews centring on that event”. To demonstrate these inadequacies of the government, Uwah (2004: 94) suggests that Mda “employs symbolism, satire and even surrealistic images”. For example, he observes that ‘filth’ has been used as a symbol to “highlight the rottenness of what he perceives to be a society on the brink of political, economic and moral collapse” (*Ibid.*). He argues that their “rotten political vision” (*Ibid.*) is revealed by the fact that they are “comfortable with the faeces in their cells” (*Ibid.*). In Uwah’s view, Mda also presents another symbol of rottenness through the character of the President whose “whole leg is riddled with sores which, till the end of the play, refuse to heal” (*Ibid.*: 95). Uwah explains that this “symbolises the difficulties faced by Africa in getting rid of its morally rotten, corrupt leaders” (*Ibid.*).

According to Uwah (2003), as in *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland*, Mda in *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall*, tackles the “concept of deception which goes hand in glove with betrayal” (Uwah 2003: 143). He argues that Mda illustrates how the Cabinet “manipulates the perceptions of the public, using its influence to deceive and betray” (*Ibid.*). The Ministers use “the frontage of film-set housing to deceive investors into perceiving prosperity” (*Ibid.*). Since the Cabinet never discusses anything regarding the improvement of the standard of living of the people, it follows that there is no structural development. The only option left for its members is to use movie props to give the impression that proper housing has been provided to the people.

For Ebewo, in *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* Mda “casts doubt on post independent South African countries in general, and on post-apartheid South Africa in particular” (Ebewo 2009: 31) though the Cabinet Ministers are comprised

“mainly of the formerly marginalized black people” (*Ibid.*). He asserts that the government officials in the play have “neglected their constitutional duties and gone for the mundane” (*Ibid.*: 32). Their portrayal gives the impression that they are being reimbursed for their participation in the liberation struggle and this is suggested by their corrupt practices and embezzlement of state funds through the awarding of contracts. On the one hand the Minister of Works, for example, is greatly respected by the other ministers because they owe their wealth to his resourcefulness. The Minister of Culture on the other hand is criticized for publishing praise poems in honour of the Wise One and compelling the Ministry of Education to declare the poems as essential reading material in schools.

Ebewo also observes that the Cabinet is made up of “dictators and sycophants who worship the President” (*Ibid.*: 32) and who “have no minds of their own and merely chorus ‘yes’ to whatever the President says” (*Ibid.*). He explains that what Mda has portrayed is a situation where the President has been given the image of an all powerful being where facts are twisted to suit the desires of a few individuals. These are the people who have successfully made their way to becoming close and trusted confidants of the President. Ebewo argues that this could result in a leader who is fascinated by self-glorification. This is suggested by the character of the President who boastfully calls himself ‘the Wise One’. To further reveal this authoritarian leadership, Amato argues that Mfundo Ndebele in the *New Nation* observed that the play is a “searching indictment of dictatorship that veers between tense and dramatic scenes where the horrors of arbitrary arrest and torture are powerfully and convincingly evoked...” (Amato in Mda 2002: xvii).

According to Ebewo the play is a tool used by Mda to criticize the Cabinet Ministers’ “attitude towards women and their lack of gender sensitivity” (Ebewo 2009: 34). He notes that:

The Cabinet has no respect for women and treats them with condescension. The Minister of Justice is clearly a chauvinist: ‘It is a fact that we are superior to them’. The Minister of Agriculture regards women, ‘the daughters of the revolution’ as a ‘nuisance’. The appointment of the

woman as a Cabinet Minister is only 'the icing on our cake'. To the President, 'the disadvantages of having her [the female minister] here are far outweighed by the benefits we'll reap from her presence'.

This view is supported by Amato in (Mda 2002) whose perspective is that in the play the new ruling elite ensure that they are the only ones who benefit from the whole colonial system. The ordinary people, especially women have not achieved anything from decolonization since the new dispensation, characterized by the qualities of the patriarchal sphere, does not require the participation of women.

My discussion supports what the other commentators of the play have said. My analysis of the play, however, demonstrates in more detail how the dramatic discourse indicates the change in women's positions. It also attempts to indicate the extent to which this has occurred

5.3. The theme of female political engagement

Even though Mda has portrayed the Minister's female character as one of the Cabinet Ministers who abuse their power and deceive the people - as the Minister of Justice tells her: "*don't try to wash yourself clean. You were part of the Cabinet decision to paint the road*"(Mda 2002:48), for the purpose of this study, this section focuses on the social positions that the male characters ascribe to her. This will be achieved through a discussion of the attitude of the male characters towards the Minister of Health; to this I now turn.

5.3.1. Gender stereotyping

Concerning gender stereotyping, Hassim notes the following:

Within the nationalist movement, the dominant constructions of political actions have been essentially masculinist. Among the youth, for example, the assumption is that the... comrades are male, young lions who roar in anger and who have characteristics of warriors. Similarly, Inkatha's impis, the amabutho, carry spears, wear skins and take their identities from Shaka's male warriors. The macho nature of politics in South Africa is

underlined during the...period of violence...Too many examples can be gleaned of the ways in which manhood and politics go hand in glove.

(Hassim 1991: 70)

Hassim's argument implies that masculine traits such as violence are intertwined with politics while femininity is synonymous with weakness. For this reason, bias against women emanates from the perception that issues which are important to women are those which concern their rights to plan a family, control their bodies and also to take care of their children. This suggests that the political domain is assigned to men since they are associated with violence. According to Hassim, violence is an important masculine trait that gives men the right to take political positions in society. Women on one hand should remain in the domestic domain since they have reproductive responsibilities which include taking care of their children. This form of stereotyping is demonstrated in the following extract:

(1) CULTURE: *Maybe they won't be as harsh on her. She is a lady. They've got to treat her like a lady.*

(2) AGRICULTURE: *She has said to me many times that she is not a lady, she is a woman.*

(3) CULTURE: *Because you use the word 'lady' patronizingly.*

(4) JUSTICE: *Never patronize a woman, my friend. Condescend, yes. It is a fact that we are superior to them. We can only treat them with condescension.*

(5) AGRICULTURE: *Anyway, that's going to teach her a thing or two. She will know that being a minister is not all fun and games. I bet when she comes back she'll know how to eat a humble pie.*

(6) JUSTICE: *Yeah. If she wants to play a man's game she must take her medicine like a man. I now doubt if we did the right thing by promoting her into the Cabinet.*

(Mda 2002: 59)

The turn taking pattern in the extract above is constructed along the lines of three options, the current speaker selects next, self selection or turn grabbing. The interactants select each other by directing comments or statements and by the pronoun 'you'. Turn change is smoothly achieved; turn order also reveals equal distribution of turns.

The topic management strategy has been used effectively in the extract to reveal the fact of gender stereotyping. It reveals asymmetrical power relations between the male characters and the Minister of Health. The Minister of Justice's utterances, for instance, point to men as the superior gender and women as the weaker one. The male characters even go to the extent of assuming that the Minister of Health will not withstand the torture merely because she is female. They believe that it will actually teach her that occupying a political position is not 'a joke'. It is a man's job.

All the characters' turns "have a joint orientation to the topic of talk" (Herman in Culpeper et al 1998: 22). They follow "the expected pattern, turn relating to previous turn" (Herman 1995: 111). The turns in short, are focused on the topic, which is the Minister of Health. The basic structural device used to introduce the topic is the adjacency pair: in the first comment-comment pair the Minister of Culture introduces the topic on the Minister of Health who is being tortured. He is concerned about the severity of the torture. He says "*maybe they won't be as harsh on her*" because "*she is a lady. They've got to treat her like a lady*". Even though the Minister of Culture seems concerned about the Minister of Health, his comment is based on sexual difference. He hopes that the torturers will not be harsh on her simply because "she is a lady". This description does not only "trivialize the subject matter under discussion" (Lakoff 1975: 23), it also ridicules her. This is because the word 'lady' has been euphemistically used, to belittle the Minister of Health. It is worth noting that the term 'lady' is usually used in a positive sense but in this particular context it is perceived as a negative designation. Lakoff explains that if the word 'lady' and 'woman' are used in the same context it means that "they have different connotations" (*Ibid.*:20). In such a situation 'lady' suggests immaturity

while 'woman' suggests maturity. The Minister of Culture, for example, hopes that the Minister of Health will not be treated harshly because she is not strong enough to stand the torture. Being a lady also means acting in accordance with feminine behaviours such as being 'nice' or 'polite'; as mentioned, this, according to Thorne and Henley in Thorne (1975: 18), "functions as a strong mechanism of social control". The word 'woman' on one hand, affirms the female character's dignity and self worth since it is associated with maturity. This view is expressed by the Minister of Agriculture who provides the second part of the adjacency pair in turn 2 where he effects a slight topic change but one which still relates to the previous turn. He remarks that the Minister of Health said to him many times that "*she is not a lady, she is a woman*". His topic change reveals the feelings of the female character about the use of the word 'lady' when referring to her. She expresses disapproval of its usage because of its derogatory connotations. It reduces her position to "one who need not be taken seriously" (*Ibid.*). In turn 3 the Minister of Culture confirms the inferior status ascribed to the Minister of Health when he avers she does not wish to be referred to as a lady because men use the word patronizingly.

In turn 4, the Minister of Justice turn grabs, interposing himself into the interaction uninvited since the previous speaker has not selected him. This turn grab is "self orientated" (Herman in Culpeper et al 1998: 27) as the speaker wants to express his own thoughts in relation to what the previous speaker has said. He remarks: "never patronize a woman, my friend, condescend, yes. It is a fact that we are superior to them". In other words, men do not have to show women that they are inferior because it is a fact that men are superior to them. From the Minister of Justice's utterance it is evident that he thinks women are unimportant beings who lack intelligence. They are essentially positioned as non entities who cannot be "entrusted with responsibilities and with decisions of any serious nature" (Lakoff 1975: 26). This kind of stereotyping is supported by the Minister of Agriculture in turn 5 who provides a topic change that points back to the Minister of Culture's turn 1 in which he hopes that the Minister of Health's punishment might be less severe. He says "anyway, that's going to teach her a thing or two. She will know that being

a Minister is not all fun and games. I bet when she comes back she'll know how to eat a humble pie". The Minister of Agriculture is confident that the female Minister is going to be given a useful lesson from the torture. He believes that she will learn that being a Minister is "*not all fun and games*". In other words, being a Minister is serious and therefore not a woman's job. He believes that she will regret ever having taken any political responsibility. This highlights the disadvantaged positions of women in politics. They are not expected to accept political positions because they are stereotyped as childish. The Minister of Justice in turn 6 pursues the topic: "If she wants to play a man's game she must take her medicine like a man". In other words, if the female Minister wants to be taken seriously, she has to act like a man; as Shanley and Pateman in Hassim(1991:70) state, "manhood and politics go hand in glove". In the same turn the Minister of Justice declares he now doubts if they "did the right thing by promoting her into the Cabinet". He automatically doubts the capabilities of females in politics, a stereotype that reduces women to being simply political pawns who are incapable of taking political decisions.

Another example that is closely related to the form of stereotyping discussed above is demonstrated in the following extract:

The sound of the key, the chains and the metal door. The dance suddenly stops and everyone is scared. The flood of light and menacing shadow.

(1) AGRICULTURE: *[to Justice] He is calling you.*

(2) JUSTICE: *No! No! He pointed at you. [To Culture] He is calling you!*

(3) CULTURE: *Oh, no... not me again. He called me yesterday. It is someone else's turn now!*

(4) HEALTH: *Oh, my God! It's me. He is calling me. How can it be?*

(5) JUSTICE: *How can it not be? Do you want to be treated as special just because you are a woman? And they say they want equality!*

(Mda 2002: 58)

In the extract turn change is achieved by current speaker selecting next option. The characters select each other by comment, gaze, pointing and by the pronoun 'you'. Turn change is smoothly achieved while turn order reveals equal distribution of turns. The characters' turns are short; they all use them to express fear of the shadowy figure that takes them one by one to be tortured. The only noticeable difference is in turn 5 where the Minister of Justice expresses his stereotypical way of thinking that men are superior to women.

The sequencing strategy has played an important role in constructing the course of the interaction. The extract begins with a stage direction informing the audience about a shadow that is about to pick out one of the Cabinet Ministers for torture. The exchanges are based on other initiated other repairs where "the recipient of the repairable item both indicates a problem in the talk and resolves it" (Liddicoat 2007: 173). The Ministers are arguing over who is the next person to be tortured. Agriculture's turn 1, "he is calling you", [pointing at Justice], is the repairable item. Justice receives it and proposes changes in it. He denies that he is the next in line and resolves the problem by stating that it is Culture's turn. Again in turn 3, Culture receives the repairable item: "[to Culture] He is calling you!" He resolves it by arguing that he has been called the previous day and "it is someone else's turn now!" In turn 4 Health reluctantly agrees that it is her turn; her utterance initiates another repair in turn 5 where Justice brings her into line and avers that being a woman does not mean she will be exempted from being tortured. As Piazza (1999: 1006) emphasized, "repairs express disagreement"; the whole extract has proven to be about the Cabinet Ministers arguing about who is next to be tortured and in the process they each reveal intense anxiety about the whole experience. What is surprising, though, is that Justice's turn 5 not only displays fear, it also reveals how women are stereotyped as inferior. Justice does not care that they are all fearful of torture. When it comes to the female Minister, he is quick to tell her that she cannot be exempted from torture simply because she is a woman. He says: "*Do you want to be treated as special just because you are a woman? And they say they want equality!*" His utterance certainly suggests that women are not equal to

men. If they wish to be in the same social and political position as the latter they need to be courageous enough to face difficult situations like torture.

5.3.2. Gendered subjects/roles

Hassim offers a useful description of gendered subjects. She explains that:

The political identities of women and of men are constituted through different relationships with the public and private spheres...Women are defined primarily in relation to their location within the private sphere, roles defined in terms of the family. For men it is the public role outside the family which is emphasized. The Western political tradition tended to limit its concept of 'politics to the public realm, thus marginalizing women.

(Hassim 1991: 73)

Hassim's view on gendered subjects and how these marginalizes women will be explored in terms of the following extract:

*(1) **PRESIDENT:** The disadvantages of having her here are far outweighed by the benefits we'll reap from her presence.*

*(2) **AGRICULTURE:** They are slow in coming, these benefits, Wise One. The Daughters of the Revolution continue to be a nuisance.*

*(3) **CULTURE:** So is that why she was made a minister, to control the Daughters of the Revolution?*

*(4) **PRESIDENT:** We made her a minister as an indication that we are an enlightened government. The fact that that would silence the Daughters of the Revolution by showing them that we had a woman in the Cabinet was supposed to be the icing on our cake. A by-product of our enlightenment.*

*(5) **JUSTICE:** Our plan didn't work then. The Daughters of the Revolution are still at it. She should have reverted to her womanly role after the revolution.*

(Mda 2002: 59)

The turn change options have been very functional in exposing the fact of gendered subjects in the extract. The turn taking pattern is constructed in terms of two options, current speaker selects next, and next speaker self selects. The interaction begins with the President initiating the conversation by a comment about the Minister of Health. For him, the disadvantages of her presence in the Cabinet are far outweighed by the benefits they will gain. What is important about the President's comment is that he declares that having a woman as a Cabinet Minister is a disadvantage. He sees her leadership as a drawback. The problem is that he has no choice but to keep her in this position because she plays an important role in his government. She is used by the government to deceive the public into perceiving women's suffrage is acknowledged. This causes people to believe that all adults have the right to vote in political elections, knowing very well that men are not prepared to share power with women. This is revealed in turn 2 by Agriculture's second pair part of the adjacency pair. Agriculture maintains the benefits are "*slow in coming*" because "*the Daughters of the Revolution continue to be a nuisance*". This implies that Health's ministerial position is meant to deceive the Daughters of the Revolution into believing that they are being represented in the government and their interests are protected. She is used as a tool to silence them; they "represent the only threat to the dominance of the President and his Cabinet" (Uwah 2003: 143). This viewpoint is confirmed by Culture who self selects against the rights of the previously selected speaker. In turn 2 Agriculture has selected the 'Wise One' or President by name. However, Culture's turn grab is important as it reveals that Health's role in the Cabinet is not primarily to execute ministerial duties, but rather "*to control the Daughters of the Revolution*". The President's turn 4 is a response that completes the question-answer sequence initiated by Culture in turn 3: we "*made her a Minister as an indication that we are an enlightened government*"; this suggests that her position as a Minister has nothing to do with her political contribution. She is there to give the impression that the government is democratic and all people have equal rights to be involved in running the country. He adds that "the fact that that would silence the Daughters of the Revolution ...is an icing in the cake": an added advantage. This reduces the

Minister of Health's status because she is used as a tool by men who do not regard her role in the Cabinet as having any significance. Not only are her status and position trivialized, but in addition her "maturity and capabilities are denied" (Osaaji 2009: 22). In turn 5, Justice self selects and argues that the plan of deceiving the people through the Minister of Health did not work because "*the Daughters of the Revolution are still at it. She should have reverted to her womanly role after the revolution*". Justice's opinion of women demonstrates the accuracy of Hassim's observation that "women are defined primarily in relation to their location with the private sphere, roles defined in terms of family" (Hassim 1991: 73). When the Minister of Justice says the Health Minister's original role is "*womanly*" he reinforces the traditional concept that a woman's place is in the family, thus ascribing an inferior status in society to women.

In the following extract, the same view on gendered roles is pursued:

- (1) **CULTURE:** *She's been gone for the whole day. God knows what they are doing to her*
- (2) **AGRICULTURE:** *Can't you shut up about her!*
- (3) **JUSTICE:** *I think it is time to change the bandages.*
- (4) **AGRICULTURE:** *Who's going to do it? The Minister of Health is not here.*
- (5) **CULTURE:** *So when you want her to work you worry about her not being here?*
- (6) **AGRICULTURE:** *It is her jurisdiction as Minister of Health to change His Excellency's bandages.*
- (7) **JUSTICE:** *More importantly she is a woman, and it is her work to take care of men. If God didn't want her to change bandages he would have made her a man.*

(Mda 2002: 68)

In the extract above, the most effective strategies in revealing the fact of gendered roles are the sequencing strategies and the topic strategy. The turn taking patterns are constructed in terms of two options, current speaker selects next and next

speaker self selects. The interaction begins smoothly with Culture introducing the topic: its focus is on the Minister of Health who has not come back from the torture. He does not obtain interactional support as Agriculture in his turn 2 stops him from enquiring about her. In order “to restore a state of continuous talk” (Maynard 1980: 264) since Agriculture has denied Culture interactional support, Justice takes the turn without being selected by the previous speaker and provides a topic change. He says, “*I think it is time to change bandages*”. In turn 4 Agriculture also provides a topic change nudging the talk away from the President whose bandages have to be changed, but focuses it on Health who is still away. Questioning, which “is a convenient way to introduce a topic” (Pridham 2001: 26), has been used by Agriculture in his turn: “*Who is going to do it? The Minister of Health is not here*”. His question implies that it is Health’s duty to change the President’s bandages, but, unfortunately for them, she has not returned. Agriculture’s question is not immediately answered because it is followed by insertion sequences. The insertions are relevant to Agriculture’s question and are very important because they reveal the subordinated status of women. In turn 5, for example, the Minister of Culture’s question: “*So when you want her to work you worry about her not being here*”, exposes the Ministers’ perception that women are primarily responsible for domestic duties. Agriculture in turn 6 becomes more specific about Health’s role and says that “*it is her jurisdiction as Minister of Health to change His Excellency’s bandages*”. His utterance suggests that the female character is not only a care giver at family level, but also in the public realm as her title, ‘Minister of Health’, implies. When the Minister of Justice in turn 7 says: “*more importantly she is a woman, and it is her work to take care of men*”, he reveals men’s culturally rooted belief that women are not only care givers, but also recognized in terms of ‘wifehood’. In the same turn Justice declares that “*if God didn’t want her to change bandages he would have made her a man*”. He reinforces men’s superior position in society by emphasizing their public role outside the family. Even though the Minister of Health has not been portrayed in a domestic setting, the male characters’ utterances in the extract still emphasize her inferior status which undermines her political position.

5.4. The Minister of Health's status

In *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* Mda explores the betrayal of the revolution by the Ministers in a post independence government. In his criticism of the Cabinet Ministers who seem to be divorced from their people, he touches on the theme of sexuality where some of the Ministers are portrayed as using public time to discuss their sexual fantasies. Throughout the play the Minister of Culture and Agriculture lusts after the female Minister of Health. I will now analyze the following extract in order to demonstrate the objectified position of women made evident by the male characters:

(1) PRESIDENT: Maybe when the Minister of Culture is brought back he'll have news of him.

(2) AGRICULTURE: That sniveling son of a bitch. He is the one they should keep instead of the Minister of Works.

(3) HEALTH: You hate him, don't you? Because he's refined and cultured and sensitive and loving.

(4) AGRICULTURE: He's a whining bastard, that's what he is. He is not a man. Why you like to pay so much attention to him I'll never understand.

(5) JUSTICE: Maybe just to make you jealous, my friend.

(6) AGRICULTURE: You are right. She wants me just as much as I want her.

(7) HEALTH: You are a joke of a man. I doubt if you even have it.

(8) AGRICULTURE: [desperately] I want you! Is that too much to ask?

(9) HEALTH: You want every little skirt that passes by

(10) JUSTICE: Is that not what women were made for...to be wanted?

(Mda 2002: 49-50)

In the extract above, the most effective strategies involved in showing the object status of the Minister of Health are the turn change options, sequencing strategies and the topic strategy. The turn taking patterns are constructed along two options, that is, current speaker selects next and next speaker self selects. The characters select each other by comment, directing a question and by the pronoun 'you'.

In the first pair, turn 1-2, the President initiates the conversation by making a comment about the Minister of Culture who has been whisked away by the shadowy figures. He hopes that the said Minister will bring back news of the Minister of Works who has not returned from torture. The Minister of Agriculture makes a follow up comment in his turn 2 and reveals his hostile attitude towards the Minister of Culture, probably because of their rivalry for the Minister of Health's affection. He avers that "...he is the one they should keep instead of the Minister of Works. In turn 3, Health self selects and drives the topic away from Works to Culture. She addresses Agriculture: *"You hate him, don't you..."* and in turn 4 Agriculture pursues the topic by providing an appropriate second pair part of the adjacency pair which constitutes an answer. He still offers a negative description of his rival: *"He's a whining bastard...He is not a man. Why you like to pay so much attention to him I'll never understand"*. Justice self selects in turn 5 and provides a topic change that focuses on the Minister of Health. In his view, Health pays attention to Culture just to make Agriculture jealous. The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010) defines the word 'jealous' as "feeling angry or unhappy because somebody you like or love is showing interest in somebody else". This definition implies that Health likes or loves Agriculture but she accords Culture her attention just to make Agriculture angry, and therefore wins his attention. This view is confirmed by Agriculture himself in turn 6 in his follow up comment: *"You are right. She wants me just as much as I want her"*. It is worth noting that the male characters' exchanges suggest that Health also wants Agriculture. They view her as "sexually loose" (Ibinga 2007: 37), as well as excited by satisfying men's sexual desires. When Agriculture comments that Health devotes her attention to Culture, Justice supports him and claims that she does this with the intention of making Agriculture jealous. The men's utterances imply that the female character is the one who is attempting to show her affection for Agriculture.

In turn 7, Health self selects, expressing surprise at Agriculture's degrading comment: *"You are a joke of a man..."* but he gives her no hearing; instead, in his next turn (8) he coerces her into giving in to his sexual demands. When he says: *"I want you"* he actually insinuates that he wants to have sex with her. He reduces

Health's status to an "object for other's gratification and use" (Mazibuko 2007: 226). Health shows no interest in expanding Agriculture's topic. Instead, she uses her turn 9 to shift the topic away from herself and confronts him about his sexual desires. She says: "*You want every little skirt that passes by*". Health's turn carries the implication that she is not the only victim but that women in general are victimized in this way. In turn 10, Justice pursues the topic and says: "*Is that not what women were made for...to be wanted?*" He seems surprised that Health refuses to give in to Agriculture's sexual advances and returns to the chauvinistic belief that women were made for men's sexual satisfaction. His comment positions women as 'other' and inferior. It implies that women are persons of no value who are only useful in providing sexual pleasure.

The following section reveals how sexual violence compromises women's positions.

5.4.1. Violence against women

The rape and violation of women are major themes in Mda's work. In *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* Mda confirms that rape occurs and furthermore cuts across all social classes. Even women in custody or prisons are victims of rape, as indicated by the female character, the Minister of Health who is under detention but undergoes the same terrible ordeal. The following extract demonstrates violence against women as portrayed in the play:

(1) HEALTH: *Won't you two shut your diseased mouths, your mouths that drip syphilis.*

(2) CULTURE: *[hurt] oh, beautiful princess!*

(3) AGRICULTURE: *Dirty thoughts, eh? Just because I want what any normal man in my circumstance would want. Just because I am not a eunuch! She is a woman, isn't she? Ha! Look, she is limping. I can see it now. They must have done it to her. And to think that she won't give us a little bit. She won't even let me touch her. Yeah, they have done it to her. They have given it to her hard and fast.*

(4) HEALTH: *You never give up, do you?*

(5) AGRICULTURE: *It's been such a long time without the balm of lovemaking, I think I am regressing to virginity.*

(6) HEALTH: *Take heart. You are saving some lucky woman the frustrations of unfulfilment.*

(7) AGRICULTURE: *Don't insult my manhood, lady. I want to bathe my battered soul in the deep night of your body...your tortured and humiliated body...*

(Mda: 2002:71)

Turn change is effected by current speaker selecting next option. Throughout the extract the characters select each other by comment, directing a question and by the pronoun 'you'. Turn order reveals unequal distribution of turns. Turn 1-3 evidence Health-Culture-Agriculture in interaction. The pattern then alters from turn 4-7 to Health-Agriculture-Health-Agriculture. The interaction chiefly revolves around Health and Agriculture.

Turn size and texture vary. Agriculture's turns are longer compared to Health's especially his turn 3 where he ventures into a long speech. In all his turns he comments about his sexual desires. Health's turns are short; she uses them to stop Agriculture from lusting after her. The topic and turn length strategies have been effectively used in revealing the implicit threat of sexual violence.

Topic control is generally in Health's hands; the others' turns orient to hers. The right to initiate exchanges is dominantly hers as her comments and questions "constrain the content of the next turn as an answer" (Herman 1995: 134). In turn 1 she initiates the topic revealing the unpleasant and dirty comments made by Agriculture and Culture about her. In turn 2 Culture does not bother to challenge her topic; he just disappointedly responds: "*Oh, beautiful princess!*" When taken at face value Culture's comment appears innocent; however, his description of the Minister of Health perpetuates the patriarchal order which positions women as sexual objects. His utterance renders Health as the object of the male gaze. All he

can see in Health is her beautiful body which men think is meant for male consumption. Agriculture takes turn 3, developing Health's topic about the dirty comments. He launches into a long turn where he reveals his lack of sympathy for women and his insensitiveness about violence against them. He begins his turn by saying: "*Dirty thoughts eh?*" He does not see his thoughts with Culture as dirty or offensive because he wants "*what any normal man...would want*", as he puts it. Wanting to have sex with Health is normal, to him, because any man wants the same thing from women. This again implies that women are there to satisfy men's sexual desires. He moves on to assert he is not a eunuch. The *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2010) defines the word 'eunuch' as "a man who has been castrated, especially one who guarded women in some Asian countries in the past". A eunuch in other words has had his testicles removed because he guards women and the procedure is designed to ensure that in no way could he demand sex from them. Therefore, when Agriculture says he is not a eunuch he implies that he is indeed a man and possesses sexual abilities and powers. Nothing could stop him from not wanting to have sex, especially with Health. He says "*she is a woman, isn't she?*" In fact he actually repeats Justice's utterance in scene 1 (see point 5.4.) which denigrates women to objects of male consumption.

In the same long turn, Agriculture comments: "*Ha! Look, She is limping...They must have done it to her*". He refers to Health's painful experience of being raped in custody. What is more shocking is that, despite the terrible ordeal that Health has been through, he still hopes to have sex with her. He says: "*And to think that she won't give us a little bit...*". This aggravates the situation women find themselves in because the unsympathetic men ignore their pain, relegating them to non-persons deficient in feelings or emotions. Agriculture further reveals his lack of sympathy for women when he maintains: "*They have done it to her. They have given it to her the hard way*". The female character in fact becomes an object of ridicule even in such difficult times for her, since Agriculture in his last turn continues to mock her: "*...I want to bathe my battered soul in the deep night of your body...your tortured and humiliated body...*".

In a nutshell, though the topic strategy has played a substantial role in revealing the act of violence against women, the turn length strategy has proved to be the most effective. Through Agriculture's long turn the oppression of woman in sexual terms has been exposed. Health's turns are short but they are direct, confrontational and powerful. As mentioned earlier, she has used them to stop the male characters from lusting after her. They show that women are not prepared to degrade themselves. Nevertheless her social status as a Minister does not protect her from abuse and Mda has placed her in a victimized position to create a full picture of the male abuse of women.

5.5. Subversion of male dominance

Although the play confirms discrimination against women in political leadership positions, it still indicates that the only female character is committed in subverting male dominance. The focus will now turn to how Mda has empowered her to subvert "the dominant masculine ideology" (Osaaji 2009: 19); for this purpose, I have selected the following extract:

*(1) **PRESIDENT:** Will my leg stay like this, unbandaged for every little fly to defecate on...while you babble off your greed for each others' bodies? Was the Honourable Minister of Culture not supposed to be attending to my sores?*

*(2) **CULTURE:** I am sorry, wise one. We were distracted by the arrival of the Honourable the Minister of Health, sir.*

*(3) **HEALTH:** So now it's my fault, eh? I am responsible for the flies as well?*

*(4) **AGRICULTURE:** It is your job to bandage the Father of the Nation. Might as well complete what your puppy here started.*

*(5) **HEALTH:** I have news for you. From now on you'll take turns to change the bandages. Never again will you see me do it.*

*(6) **CULTURE:** How do you change them anyway? We don't have any clean bandages here.*

(7) HEALTH: *Ha! Clean bandages, eh? Have you ever seen anything clean here? Use the same bandage. Just turn it around and use the other side. That's what I used to do when I was the bandage changer.*

(Mda 2002: 71-72)

The turn taking patterns in the extract are constructed along two options, current speaker selects next and next speaker self selects. The characters select each other by name, the pronoun 'you', comment and by directing a question. Turn order reveals unequal distribution of turns, with Health having more turns compared to the other characters which makes her a dominant conversational partner.

The sequencing strategy has played a major role in constructing the course of the interaction. The dialogue begins with a series of question-answer pairs which the President initiates by asking the first question: *"Will my leg stay like this, unbandaged for every fly to defecate on...Was the Minister of Culture not supposed to be attending to my sores?"* From the President's utterance we learn that somebody has to take care of him. Owing to the absence of Health, since Justice has declared that because she is a woman, it is *"her work to take care of men"*(see point 5.3.2), Culture is chosen to take her place. In the same scene it is shown that just before Culture could perform 'Health's duty' of cleaning the President's sores, the Minister of Health is thrown back into the cell. In his turn the President selects Culture by name who takes the turn and provides the second pair part of adjacency pairing: *"I am sorry Wise One. We were distracted by the arrival of the Honourable Minister of Health, sir"*. Health self selects in turn 3 and initiates a question-answer pair that orients to the previous turn: *"So now it's my fault eh? I am responsible for the flies as well?"* From this utterance one is able to read the character's tone and attitude which introduces us to the first step taken by the female character in subverting male dominance. Her sarcastic tone shows that she is not willing to budge and carry out the role prescribed to her by the male characters. Similarly, her attitude is confrontational, an attribute associated with males. Women's language is considered "inferior to that of men" (Lakoff in Thorne and Henley 1975: 25) because the latter "allows for stronger and forceful

statements” (*Ibid.*) which reinforce their “positions of strength in the real world” (*Ibid.*). Health is however, able to “transcend gender to subvert” (Lombardoizzi 2005: 222) patriarchal institutions that deny women equality, even in linguistic terms. She achieves this by using her turn to sarcastically challenge her oppressors.

In turn 4 Agriculture completes the question-answer pair initiated by Health and claims: “*It is your job to bandage the Father of the Nation*”. Upon realizing Health’s position of power, Agriculture reverts to his “patriarchal mental set up” (Osaaji 2009: 23) that it is a woman’s role to take care of men. Health makes a follow up comment in turn 5: “*I have news for you. From now on you’ll take turns to change the bandages*”. Her tone is authoritative and “reminiscent of patriarchal speech” (Ibinga 2007: 99). She essentially assumes the role of the male oppressors and rejects the duties which are traditionally feminine. When she says: “*Never again will you see me do it*”, she refuses to accept the men’s ideology which associates her political identity with her private realm.

In turn 6 Culture initiates another question-answer pair: “*How do you change the bandages here?*” He humbles himself before Health who has assumed the men’s position of power. His question indicates that he is willing to learn the duties formerly associated with women. In her response in the last turn, Health is already instructing Culture to do the job. By “establishing her masculine power” (*Ibid.*), Health draws attention to her “determination to break all prejudices about women” (*Ibid.*).

Health’s willingness to change the status quo is also demonstrated in the extract below:

(1) HEALTH: *He is hurt about his pet, don’t you understand that?*

(2) JUSTICE: *But it happened so long ago.*

(3) HEALTH: *You don’t forget a pet that easily. I still have not forgotten my spider.*

(4) CULTURE: *[Smiles fondly] Ah, the black widow spider!*

(5) YOUNG MAN: *He killed your pet too? He's been busy, hey!*

(6) JUSTICE: *No. Not the spider. I had nothing to do with the death of her spider.*

(7) HEALTH: *They were beautiful, those spiders. A huge black widow spider female and a small male. They mated, and then the female ate the male. Wouldn't it be nice if things happened like that with human beings as well?*

(8) JUSTICE: *Ha! Women eating their men after men after love making!*

(9) HEALTH: *The age of the disposable male is coming, my friend. It is surely coming. It's surely going to happen one day when the human species has evolved to the great levels of the black widow.*

(Mda 2002: 86)

Turn change is effected by current speaker selects next and next speaker self selects options. The characters select each other by comment, directing a question and by the pronoun 'you'. Turn order reveals unequal distribution of turns, with Health taking more turns compared to the other characters. The characters' turns are generally short except for Health's turns 7 and 9 which are noticeably longer than those of the others'. Health uses her turns to present the metaphorical behaviour of her spiders. The other characters' turns orient to hers.

The topic and the turn length strategy prove to be the most effective in showing how male dominance has been subverted. The topic control is generally in Health's hands because she is the source of the topic and it becomes everyone's topic. The "basic structural device used to introduce topics and to build the conversation" (Pridham 2001: 25) is the adjacency pair of comment-comment. The extract begins with Health initiating the topic about Culture's pet that had been killed; he is still hurt about the loss. Justice, who has been selected by the pronoun 'you', by the previous speaker, completes the pair: *"But it happened so long ago"*. Health initiates another pair, providing a slight topic change. With her comment: *"I still have not forgotten my spider"*, she shifts the focus and direction of the talk away from Culture to herself. Culture offers her interactional support by completing the

pair: “*Ah, the black widow spider!*” The Young Man then self selects in turn 5. He wants to know if Justice was also responsible for the death of Health’s spiders. Justice responds: “*No. Not the spider...*”, provoking Health’s response on this matter who takes the floor by self selecting because he has not been selected by the previous speaker. As Herman 1995: 119) states, speeches can be “purely experience directed”, in this case, Health grabs turn 7 in order to explain what happened to her spiders. She first explains that “*they were beautiful...A huge black widow and a small male. They mated and the female ate the male*”. The Minister of Health’s account of her spiders is important as it reveals the possibility of social change. Health predicts the end of male dominance. Her reference to the black widow spider which is known for eating the male after mating is an indication that she associates herself with the black widow spider. She would also like to get rid of the men in her life and be in a superior position of power. In analyzing Health’s utterance, I find Osaaji (2009)’s work based on the story of Hare and Elephant narrated by Magdalene of Kenya, very resourceful as it also subverts the dominant masculine ideology.

In Magdalene’s story, the Hare, a small animal, eats Elephant’s food. The food was meant to heal Elephant’s mother in-law. Upon realizing that it is Hare who ate the food Elephant wanted to punish Hare severely but the latter tricks Elephant and ends up punishing Hyena. Elephant’s mother in-law eventually dies. According to Osaaji (2009: 22) “this story of the mighty falling at the hands of the weak also encodes a subtle and powerful message on the relationship between the weak and the strong in our human societies”. As in Magdalene’s story, Health’s spiders are “metaphorical representations of human beings and their behavior” (*Ibid.*). In Health’s world, men are the dominant gender. Women are “perceived as weak” (*Ibid.*) and expected to do “soft or less dangerous roles of caring for children and the family” (*Ibid.*); as Justice declares Health “*should have reverted to her womanly role after the revolution*”. In Magdalene’s story, Elephant is a “symbolic representation of men” (*Ibid.*) while Hare, who is small in size, “stands for women” (*Ibid.*). The small Hare in Magdalene’s story triumphs over the big Elephant. With respect to Health’s spiders, the black widow female is large whereas the male

spider is small in size. The male spider is not only disempowered by its size, but also by the fact that the female eats it after mating. This triumph of the female spider over the male one signifies “the vicarious victory of women over patriarchal structure” (*Ibid.*). In fact, Health in the same turn comments that it would be good if the same occurred with human beings.

In turn 8 Justice expresses shock about Health’s story: “*Ha! Women eating their men after love making!*” He is not however, given any interpersonal support. Instead, Health in turn 9 comments that: “*The age of the disposable males is coming...where human species would have evolved to the great levels of the black widow*”. In short, she foresees a future where social change would be inevitable, a future where those kept at the margins of society would be brought to the centre.

5.6. Conclusion

The options of exploitation offered by the turn taking system have been notably effective in drawing attention to the changing positions of women in *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* The main theme of the play, female political engagement, has been successfully explored and it has been discovered that women in the public sphere are stereotyped as incapable of taking political decisions. It has been shown that the political identities of both women and men are constituted through their relationships with their public and private spheres. Through his female character, Mda has also been able to criticize men’s insensitiveness towards violence against women. The Minister of Health’s reminiscences about her spiders have expressed her hope for social change where the marginalized will one day triumph over the dominant.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL CONCLUSION

To recapitulate: my study has focused on Mda's post colonial plays: in it I sought to answer the question regarding how the dramatic discourse in *The Nun's Romantic Story*, *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* and *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* depicts the positions of women in post colonial African states. In analysing the dramatic discourse In Mda's three plays, Herman (1995)'s work has been very useful. It is worth noting that from the definition of dramatic dialogue as discourse, one can establish the value of the approach taken in this study. Dialogue as discourse is "interactive and interactional. It is a mode of speech exchange among participants, speech in relation to another's speech and not merely the verbal expression of one character or actor's part" (Herman 1995: 1). In short, it requires the involvement of at least two people who take the role of speaker and listener. The speaker sometimes switches the role to that of listener while the listener becomes the speaker. This important feature of dialogue ensures the possibility that one may infer the relationship between the speakers because in dialogue there is always the element of 'otherness'. This feature also links conversation with dialogue. The interactive processes and rules operative in daily life enhance our understanding of interactions in plays: one of the dimensions involved in the analysis of interaction is the notion of turn taking. This is very useful in determining power relations. One of the resources of turn taking is the turn change options. Self selection or turn grab, for example, can be used by a character who wants to express his or her thoughts, especially when he or she feels superior to the previous speaker. Other turn change options privilege one

character over the other. It is a norm in turn taking that characters have equal rights to the floor but if this rule is defied it means that other characters will be excluded from the talk. In this kind of turn change, exclusion becomes a strategy which enables one to deduce the personalities of the characters involved.

Turn distribution strategies also prove to be very useful. When characters hog the floor or block other characters from having access to it, these speeches may be indicators of the exercising of power by the speaker. A dramatist's turn sequencing strategies are also important because they are involved in shaping the interaction. For example, when a character initiates and controls a topic, this might reveal his or her superior position of power. A summary of some of my findings follows.

In *The Nun's Romantic Story* the exclusion strategy, which is a consequence of the distribution pattern adopted by the dramatist, has been used to confine the floor to one gender, thus revealing the asymmetrical power relations between the genders. In tackling the act of male dominance, for instance, the turn distribution has been proven to privilege the male characters, thus revealing their dominance. The topic strategy which is generally used when the male characters discuss how they will defend Anna-Maria in the court of law generally has the wider implication that she is incapable of controlling her own affairs, which perpetuates their dominance and relegates her to a minor position. The sequencing strategy has been very effective in turns where Anna-Maria refuses to provide the evidence needed by the lawyers. She would sometimes not provide the second pair part of the adjacency pair, withholding information needed by the lawyers. At times silences are used by Anna-Maria to dramatize the difficulty of revealing her painful experience. The dramatist has used the sequences to emphasize the subordinate status of women since the lawyers verbally and emotionally abuse the female character under the notion of wanting evidence. Even though the play has presented the female protagonist as suffering marginalization in a male dominated society, through the turn length strategy the dramatist has empowered his female character with the voice to confront and to subvert the structures which reinforce gender based inequality.

In *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* the turn length strategy has also been used to allow the female characters to expose the role played by men's betrayal of women in denigrating them. Both the Woman and the Lady's turns are long when they reveal their vulnerable positions. The turn length strategy enables the Lady to argue that the Girls in their Sunday Dresses are not different from her because they also get laid to sit behind the office desks, in order to make money that will enable them to buy food. It also enables the Lady to explain why she is obsessed with appearance; to do this she effectively hogs the floor and launches into very long turns. In her explanation we note the "social definition of beauty and whiteness as synonymous" (Peterson in Mda 1993: xx). This also sheds some light on the issue of sexism, that is, the need for women to look beautiful for other people – men. Their chronic state of poverty has been revealed by the repair sequences which, according to Piazza (1999) are used to display disagreement. The women's disagreement over the number of days they have spent in the queue has evidenced their impoverished status as they are obliged to live outdoors for days. The same strategy reveals their acceptance of abuse through the use of the Lady's chair of patience as they wait patiently to buy what rightfully belongs to them. Even though Mda has presented the women in dire situations, the topic strategy proves to be very effective in revealing their strength and commitment in bringing about social change.

As has been indicated in the conclusion of chapter five, the options for exploitation of speech offered by the turn taking system have been very effective in exposing the changing positions of women in *You Fool, How Can the Sky Fall?* The main theme of the play discussed in this chapter is the theme of female political engagement. It has been successfully discovered that Women in the public sphere are stereotyped as incapable of taking political decisions. The most popular strategies in showing the changing positions of women are the turn change strategies. Turn grabs, for example, have been used when characters want to express their thoughts about ideas discussed by previous speakers. One noticeable turn grab is carried out by Justice to declare that men are superior to women (see point 5.3.1.), relegating them to unimportant beings who cannot be

entrusted with responsibilities and decisions of any nature. Under the discussion on gendered roles (see point 5.3.2), it is Culture's turn grab that highlights Health's role in the Cabinet as being not to execute ministerial duties but to control the Daughters of the Revolution. This not only trivializes women's status and position, but also denies their political capabilities. Through the insertion sequences (see point 5.3.2.) Health's inferior status is emphasized. The male characters declare that it is the responsibility of women to take care of men. Other important themes which denigrate women's position in society are their status as objects presented through the character of Health and also the acts of violence against women. It is nonetheless, worth noting that despite these challenges that undermine their status, through Health's metaphoric story of her spiders, Mda foresees the triumph of the marginalized over the dominant.

What is important about the study is that it discloses the difficult positions of women not only in the postcolonial societies where the plays are set, but also in many of the African societies. It is not difficult for women to associate with the themes tackled in these plays. In all three Mda has portrayed women as the marginalized subjects in male dominated societies. However, he has managed to empower his female characters with the voice to face their oppressors. They demand to be heard. The *Nun's Romantic Story* exhibits the intensity of gender based violence but indicates that there is still hope that women will eventually subvert the structures that perpetuate gender based inequality. This view is reinforced in *And the Girls in their Sunday Dresses* since the play demonstrates that it is possible for women to join hands in effecting social change. *You Fool How can the Sky Fall?* exposes the predicament of women who manage to climb the social ladder to become political leaders. These women are still stereotyped as incapable of handling political issues because men believe that politics is a man's job. In all three plays, it has been revealed that women continue to be considered as objects of men's desire, but the Minister of Health's refusal to give in to Agriculture's sexual demands is an indication that women have power to escape brutal male dominance.

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